

Access to Higher Education:

A Case Study of Policy Intentions and Policy Effects

Alison Kirton

Institute of Education

University of London

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2002



## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the relationship between policy intentions and policy effects. As a qualitative case study, the research focuses on an access course developed by teachers in a sixth form college in inner London. The study examines teachers' motives and students' experiences of the course as well as their post college careers over seven years. It draws on a combination of data, including interviews with teachers and students and documentary materials. In order to contextualise the research, four 'episodes' in the national development of access education are examined. Ball's policy cycle provides a theoretical framework and a toolbox of theories and concepts are employed, drawn from feminism(s) as well as structural and post-structuralist perspectives.

The empirical study begins by telling the teachers' story of the development and demise of this access policy. The focus then moves to the students and the extent to which they could re-write the policy text and how this changed in different contexts of the policy cycle. At the sixth form college the opportunities for such re-making were considerable, with students characterised as 'receivers', 'rejecters' and the largest group 'recreators'. In higher education and in job seeking their room to manoeuvre was much more constrained.

A recurring theme throughout the thesis is that despite the social justice intentions of these teachers some aspects of the policy were stigmatising. Targeting students for special treatment involved drawing attention to their 'difference' in order to justify the allocation of resources. This involved a recognition-redistribution dilemma and may have disadvantaged them further in some ways.

This thesis supports former research findings of the mismatch between the ethos and teaching methods of access courses and those of higher education. Despite juggling and struggling with the demands of their degree courses the majority of students were eventually 'successful.' Four students rejected higher education in favour of alternative careers and even those with degree qualifications found these did not ensure graduate employment.

The policy cycle approach is developed theoretically by adding explanatory power through the concept of recognition-redistribution dilemmas and by providing some

evidence that the model under-emphasises structural constraints. The thesis concludes by highlighting issues confronting the future of access education.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my supervisors Professor Sally Power and Professor Geoff Whitty for their encouragement and unfailing yet critical support.

I am indebted to the teachers and students of NSFC for their generosity and time making this research possible.

To my colleagues in the PhD support group at the Institute of Education I owe a debt of gratitude for understanding, collaboration and emotional support.

I wish to thank all those friends who believed in me more than I believed in myself and urged me to complete this thesis. In particular Val Hey, Mark Kirby, and Judy Larsen.

To my family Paul and Marion, John and Mavis and Ruth for their love and patience.



## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my mother Edith Surtees Kirton who was always an inspiration to me. She received her PhD from Lancaster University at the age of seventy-seven. To my father Edward Kirton who supported her fully in her studies.

## **GLOSSARY**

**NSFC – Northside Sixth Form College.**

**PLC – Polytechnic Link Course.**

**HELC - Higher Education Link Course.**

**ILEA – Inner London Education Authority.**

**FEFC – Further Education Funding Council.**

**HEFC – Higher Education Funding Council.**

**WEA – Workers’ Educational Association**

**MSC – Manpower Services Commission.**

**AVAs - Authorised Validating Agencies.**

**GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education.**

**A level – Advanced Level Examination.**

**NNEB – National Nursery Examination Board.**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

#### **INTRODUCTION, RATIONALE AND THESIS OUTLINE**

<b>1.1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.2</b>	<b>The aims of the research .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Rationale.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Context of the Research .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.5</b>	<b>The Student Cohort.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Definition of Terms Used in the Thesis.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.7</b>	<b>Outline and Organisation of the Thesis.....</b>	<b>19</b>

### **CHAPTER TWO**

#### **ACCESS EDUCATION: A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT?**

<b>2.1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Providing a brief historical context .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.2.1	Radical working class adult education traditions .....	22
2.2.2	Access education in the first half of the 20th century .....	23
2.2.3	Links with Access Education in the 1970s.....	24
2.2.4	Pockets of access activity in the 1970s.....	24
2.2.5	Recontextualisation: from the 1970s to the 1990s .....	25
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Researching ‘Access’ and Access Education.....</b>	<b>27</b>
2.3.1	Who Has Access to Higher Education?.....	28
2.3.2	Ethnic Minority Representation.....	29
<b>2.4</b>	<b>More Recent Trends.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Are Access Courses Recruiting ‘Disadvantaged’ Groups?.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>2.6</b>	<b>Targeting - Rhetoric Rather than Reality? .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2.7</b>	<b>Researching Access Students’ Experiences .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2.8</b>	<b>Adults, Motivation and Higher Education .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2.9</b>	<b>Alternative Routes, Alternative Identities.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>2.10</b>	<b>What is to be Learnt From Such Research? .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>2.11</b>	<b>A Useful Lens to View the Whole Educational System?.....</b>	<b>40</b>

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO POLICY AND POLICY ANALYSIS**

<b>3.1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Traditional Approaches to Policy and Policy Analysis.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Varieties of Marxism.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Newer approaches to policy and policy analysis. ....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Researching Conservative Education Policy.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Policy Trajectory Studies.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.7</b>	<b>The Bigger Picture: Linking the Micro and the Macro.....</b>	<b>51</b>

3.8	The Policy Cycle .....	52
3.9	Strengths of the Policy Cycle Approach to Policy Work .....	56
3.10	Critiques of the Policy Cycle Approach to Policy Work.....	57
3.11	Feminist Approaches to Policy and Policy Analysis .....	60
3.12	Conclusion .....	64

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1	Introduction.....	66
4.2	Locating myself in the research process.....	66
4.3	The Influence of Education Policy Sociology .....	67
4.4	A Policy Cycle Approach: A Methodological Choice.....	67
4.5	Is the Study Ethnographic? .....	69
4.6	Defining the 'Case' .....	71
4.7	Organising the Field Work .....	72
4.8	Using Documentary Sources .....	73
4.9	Interviews .....	74
4.10	Data Analysis.....	75
4.11	Transcribing the tapes .....	76
4.12	A Longitudinal Study.....	76
4.13	Teacher to Researcher: the Other Side of the Desk.....	77
4.14	Conclusion .....	80

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FROM PRACTICE TO INFLUENCE: THE POLICY CYCLE(S) OF ACCESS EDUCATION

5.1	Introduction.....	81
5.2	Introducing the 'Episodes' of Access Education.....	81
5.3	Episode One: 1973 - 1977 'Pockets of Activity, of Access Education .....	83
5.4	Episode Two - 1978-1989- From Equality to Quality in Policy Concerns.....	86
5.5	Episode Two: Mixed Political Motives .....	88
5.6	Episode Two: Evaluating the Success of the DES Pilot .....	89
5.7	Episode Two: A Conservative Government Comes to Power .....	89
5.8	Episode Two: Was Access Education Lowering Academic Standards? .....	91
5.9	Episode Two: Legitimation as the Third Route to Higher Education.....	93
5.10	Episode Two: Recognition, Regulation and Normalisation.....	95
5.11	Episode Three 1989-1997: Massification, Markets and New Modalities .....	96
5.12	Episode Three: Was Access Education Under Threat from these Changes? .	97
5.13	Episode Three: New Access Education for New Times? .....	98
5.14	Episode Three: New 'Pockets of Activity' in the Context of Practice .....	99
5.15	Conclusion .....	101

## CHAPTER SIX

### TEXT PRODUCTION: THE CASE AND ITS CONTEXT

6.1	Introduction.....	103
6.2	A Chronology of the HELC and its Context .....	104
6.3	Poverty and Privilege: Local Education Markets .....	106
6.4	Protecting the Interests of Local Students .....	109
6.5	An Orthodox Access Course or Using an A level Framework ?.....	110
6.6	Personal Versus Structural Motives.....	113
6.7	What was the HELC? .....	115
6.8	The College Culture .....	117
6.9	Voices and Silences of Policy Production .....	119
6.10	The Fate of the Text .....	123
6.11	“Thatcher’s Children”? .....	125
6.12	Conclusion .....	126

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE CONTEXT OF PRACTICE: ‘RECEIVERS’ ‘REJECTERS’ AND ‘RECREATORS’

7.1	Introduction.....	128
7.2	Introducing the characters.....	129
7.3	Were they truly disadvantaged?.....	130
7.4	The HELC: ‘Receivers’ ‘Rejecters’ and ‘Recreators’ .....	135
7.5	Policy intentions: Learning support and links with higher education .....	136
7.6	‘Receivers’: Ade, Lisa and Tim .....	137
7.7	‘Rejecters’: Mark, Max and Seth .....	144
7.7.1	‘Rejecting’ Higher Education .....	147
7.8	‘Recreators’: Danny, Denise, Eleni, Kit, Lola and Zelda .....	148
7.8.1	Recreating the Social Justice Intentions .....	149
7.8.2	Recreating the learning support .....	154
7.8.3	Recreating the Higher Education Intentions.....	156
7.9	Conclusion: Tensions within the policy, Redistribution and Recognition ...	161

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT: CHOICES AND CONSTRAINTS

8.1	Introduction.....	165
8.2	Themes for Complex Transitions .....	166
8.3	Receivers, Recreators and Rejecters .....	168
8.4	Freedom to Choose Within Constraints .....	170
8.5	From ‘Receivers’ to Jugglers and Strugglers: Ade, Lisa and Tim .....	170
8.6	Graduate employment .....	176
8.7	Rejecters: Mark, Max and Seth.....	176
8.7.1	Alternative Employment: Education and Enterprise.....	180
8.8	Recreators: Kit, Lola , Zelda , Denise and Eleni.....	181
8.8.1	Kit, Lola and Zelda: ‘Doing the Right Thing’ .....	182
8.8.2	Graduate Employment? .....	186

<b>8.9</b>	<b>Denise and Eleni: Doing Otherwise .....</b>	<b>188</b>
8.9.1	Alternative Occupations? .....	190
<b>8.10</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>191</b>

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **A CONCLUDING DISCUSSION**

<b>9.1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>9.2</b>	<b>Starting Points.....</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>9.3</b>	<b>The Relationship Between Policy Intentions and Policy Effects.....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>9.4</b>	<b>The Social Processes Involved in the Production and the Fate of the HELC</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>9.5</b>	<b>Policy Recommendations .....</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>9.6</b>	<b>Fourth Episode - Access Education Within a Social Inclusion Agenda .....</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>9.7</b>	<b>Evaluating the Policy Cycle .....</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>9.8</b>	<b>The Limitations of the Research.....</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>9.9</b>	<b>Questions for Further Research .....</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>9.10</b>	<b>Closing Comments .....</b>	<b>210</b>

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>212</b>
--------------------------	------------

<b>LIST OF APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>225</b>
--------------------------------	------------

## **LIST OF TABLES**

<b>Table 1: A chronology of the HELC and its context.....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Table 2: A profile of the 1990-1992 cohort of the HELC .....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Table 3: GCSE Qualifications gained at secondary school and NSFC .....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Table 4: ‘Receivers’ GCSE results and criteria for social and educational disadvantage .....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>Table 5: ‘Receivers’ A level results and applying to higher education .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Table 6: ‘Rejecters’ GCSE results and criteria for social and educational disadvantage .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Table 7: ‘Rejecters’ A level results and applying to higher education .....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>Table 8: ‘Recreaters’ GCSEs and criteria for social and educational disadvantage .....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>Table 9: ‘Recreating’ The Higher Education Options .....</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>Table 10: Predicted and actual A level grades.....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Table 11: Student trajectories and responses 1990 - 1997.....</b>	<b>169</b>

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction, Rationale and Thesis Outline**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis describes the results of a longitudinal qualitative case study of an access course. It traces the longer-term effects of an access policy through the transitions of one group of students from this course into higher education and work.

Access education represents attempts by educators to provide opportunities for those sections of society who do not normally enter post compulsory education. Access courses, at their best, were designed to provide the skills and confidence necessary to deal with the demands of degree-level study. They were student-centred and developed to respond to the needs of students in local communities. The motives of such access educators were most often empowerment and equity (Diamond, 1999). Such characteristics make access education an important area of study. Despite changes in status and form, access education remains an important means of entry to post-compulsory education for excluded groups. The access course which is the focus of this study was developed by teachers in an inner city sixth form college to protect the interests of mainly working class, minority ethnic students. Links with universities provided the possibility of progression into higher education for such students. The learning support provided was aimed at enabling students to become both collaborative and autonomous learners.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is threefold. Firstly, I will provide the aims, focus and rationale of the research. Secondly, I will introduce the thesis and define the terms used within it and finally, I will provide an outline of the chapters.

#### **1.2 The aims of the research**

The main aim of this research has been to consider the relationship between the policy intentions and policy effects of a scheme designed to improve access to higher education for a group of 16-19 year olds. Whilst access education often focuses on mature adults, in this research I draw on the educational biographies of one cohort of students who were



enrolled in *The Higher Education Link Course* (HELC) which shared many of the characteristics of access education courses for mature adults.

Four aims guided my research –

1. To examine the development of a small policy initiative: particularly the social processes involved in its production and its subsequent fate.
2. To adapt and develop a policy cycle approach to trace the historical and ideological development of access education nationally from the early 1970s to the late 1990s.
3. To explore the relationship between policy intentions and policy effects: in particular how one group of students and teachers involved 'made' and 're-made' the policy in each context of the policy cycle according to their own agendas and biographies.
4. To consider the implications of this research for contemporary developments in access education and policy sociology.

### **1.3 Rationale**

I had three main reasons for undertaking this research. One was the contribution that this study could make to the then relatively under-researched area in education policy sociology of access education and in particular, the transitions from college to higher education and work. In this sense, the longitudinal nature of this study is a significant feature of the work. Another, was my personal interest in the fate of the course and the cohort of students who were my tutor group from 1990-1991. As a teacher at the College and course tutor I made use of my insider knowledge. Navigating this dual role as both practitioner and researcher was not unproblematic, a point that I take up further in my methodology chapter. A third reason for undertaking the study was that the entry of this cohort into further and higher education occurred during interesting times in terms of policy making. The establishment of the HELC corresponded closely with the introduction of incorporation of further education as well as the massification and marketisation of higher education.

Access education is both popular and controversial and in this sense the study is a very useful vantage point from which to observe these changes. I use the observations of the policy intentions and effects to reflect forward to current educational trends and policies on widening participation.

#### **1.4 Context of the Research**

The study was undertaken at Northside Sixth Form College (hereafter NSFC) which was established in 1984 to replace the sixth forms in its partner schools in an inner London borough. In 1988 Humanities teachers at NSFC set up *The Polytechnic Link Course* which became the *HE Link Course* in 1992. The course was aimed at providing access opportunities for 'non-traditional' students. This involved providing distinct forms of learning support and progression routes into higher education. The research took place between 1992 and 1999. Teachers were interviewed about establishing the course and the subsequent events that contributed to its demise. Students were interviewed at crucial points in their transition from College into higher education, further education and the labour market. Eight parents, all mothers, were interviewed about their children's educational progress. Methodologically and theoretically I drew on the policy cycle approach (Bowe, Ball with Gold, 1992) to analyse this small policy initiative, drawing eclectically on post-structuralism, feminisms and structural sociological perspectives.

#### **1.5 The Student Cohort**

At this point I will provide some background to the students who were the focus of the study. There were twelve students who enrolled as the 1990 cohort of the HELC, five young men, Danny, Mark, Max, Seth and Tim and seven young women, Ade, Denise, Eleni, Kit, Lisa, Lola and Zelda. They were heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and social class. One characteristic they had in common is that they had all previously attended inner city comprehensives in Northside or surrounding boroughs where they had 'under-achieved' in their GCSE examinations. Catering for local students like these prompted teachers in the Humanities Department to develop a course that would better meet the students' needs and also provide greater levels of support to ensure successful transition into higher education. The HELC did not fall into the traditional category of 'access education' that was aimed at mature adults from systemically disadvantaged

groups in further and adult education. The course was within an A level examination framework and was designed to provide learning support for disadvantaged students. The most significant variation was the different entry criteria and the level of support provided to students. Using the term 'access education' raises theoretical points that should be examined more thoroughly, along with other concepts that are to be used in the thesis, so before proceeding further, I will provide a brief definition of the key terms used.

## **1.6 Definition of Terms Used in the Thesis**

Whilst recognising that there is a range of specialist terms used throughout the thesis, some of which are examined more thoroughly in later chapters, it is important at this stage to establish the definitions that I have adopted throughout the study, especially those that are contested. Several key concepts will be explored below, including 'access education', 'non-traditional students', 'further education' and 'higher education'

### ***Access Education***

'Access' is a common and contested term. There are varying and competing definitions many of which relate to different historical moments and theoretical positions. I explore these more fully in the following chapter and in Chapter Five. For now however it is important to note that the focus of this thesis is the policy processes associated with an access course designed for non-traditional 16-19 year olds in a sixth form college. Such a group were not the conventional focus of access measures which developed historically to provide a 'second chance to learn' for mature adults who were systemically disadvantaged groups. Most of these schemes took place in further and adult education colleges and higher education institutions in the 1970s and 1980s. In recognition that HELC differed significantly from other access courses, I have found Parry's (1996) definition and use of the term 'access education' useful. Parry broadly defines the terrain of access education –

to include types of provision which combine two main features: a curriculum which is concerned with preparation for courses and qualifications which specify conditions for entry (or progression) ; and a programme of study which is aimed at those who might be excluded, disadvantaged, delayed or otherwise deterred by a need to qualify for entry in more conventional ways.....In this simple formulation, access education is not associated

with any particular sector or level of education; nor is it identified necessarily with any particular group or category of students, although many are likely to be drawn from groups whose participation in post-school education and training has been less overall, or more unevenly distributed, than for others.

(Parry, 1996:11)

Using such a broad definition is important for several reasons. Defining 'access education' flexibly gives recognition to its changing structure, form and historical status as well as the ways in which new constituencies for access are constantly emerging. Secondly, while recognising the different motives of access educators (Leiven, 1989), it can be seen as a collective movement to provide opportunities to disadvantaged groups rather than merely a set of courses or schemes (Williams, 1997). As such it is linked historically with earlier movements for working class emancipatory education (Benn and Burton, 1995; Mangan, 1991; Parry, 1996). Thirdly, for many access educators the discourses involved were wider than just providing access to higher education as they also included notions of the development of the self and empowerment. Fourthly, Tight (1993) argues strongly to maintain a broad vision of access and outlines the various ways in which mature adults can gain entry to higher education. These include 'access through examination or assessment, through liberal adult education provision, through the assessment of prior learning, through probationary enrolment and through open entry' (p. 68). Such diverse access schemes should not be conflated with access courses he claims.

'Access' is also used to describe which groups have entry to higher education as well as the accessibility of the curriculum and pedagogy. There is a debate about the relationship between the two, described as little 'a' and big 'A' by Leicester (1993:60). She summarises these issues in terms of 'entry' and 'accessibility' and describes how 'big Access' deals with facilitating entry to higher education whereas 'little access' deals with the need to make institutions more responsive in curriculum and ethos to the needs of 'non-traditional' students. Whether the entry of more and different students to higher education has led to such a change continues to be debated (Smith, Scott and Mackay 1993; Williams, 1997). Through the experiences of a group of 'non-traditional' students, this thesis examines the processes involved in both little 'a' and big 'A' access. It tracks not only the entry of this group to higher education but also how accessible they found the curriculum and institutional ethos.

### ***Non-Traditional Students***

I am critical of the ways in which education systems are traditionally embedded in polarising discourses. Some examples of typical binaries are provided by Williams (1997:25) – elite v. mass; standard v. non-standard; traditional v. non-traditional; quality v. access. For the purposes of this study however, there is a need to differentiate students who do not enter higher education through the standard A level route at age eighteen. Such students are variously called ‘non-conventional’, ‘non-standard’, ‘mature’ ‘alternative entry’ or ‘non-traditional’. The term ‘non-traditional’ is used in this research in recognition that some of the students in this study had no tradition of higher education in their families, or their backgrounds were working class. Some students were also from ethnic minorities and some had had their education disrupted for a variety of reasons. All students had attended inner city comprehensives which they left with poor GCSE grades. This distinguishes them from ‘traditional’ categories of white, middle class eighteen year-old students. Such students who have good GCSE and A level grades are the more usual entrants to higher education. Ball and his colleagues (Ball, Macguire & Macrae, 2000) in their distinction between traditional and ‘new’ A-levellers highlight the issue of categorising students in post-16 education. ‘New A-levellers’ were described as those students who were the first or part of the first generation in their families to take A-levels. In this sense, some of the students in this study could be categorised as ‘New A-levellers’. The delineation of students as ‘New A-levellers’ or ‘non-traditional’ is problematic as it may indicate a boundary of who is considered worthy or capable of studying in higher education against the ‘other’ of non-standard students without the traditional requirements for entry. This may lead to such students being positioned as second-class or inferior. However in order to make a case for special treatment, targeting or extra resources the label ‘non-traditional’ is necessary. This tension is examined throughout the thesis.

### ***Further and Higher Education.***

During the period covered in this research, the 1970s to the 1990s, the definitions of and boundaries between, further and higher education have shifted and changed. Further education colleges which had their roots in Mechanics Institutes and technical schools of the late nineteenth century have traditionally been responsible for vocational education.

After the Second World War these developed into technical colleges which were responsible for the work-related curriculum, mainly day release schemes developed to support apprenticeships. Alongside such colleges, adult education institutes were set up to cater for leisure, academic and vocational courses on a part-time basis. The 1970s and 1980s saw the technical colleges expand and transform themselves into colleges of further education with a much wider range of academic and vocational courses and students. They responded to the educational needs of the communities in which they were located and the priorities of the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) that funded them. Many of the early access schemes, described in Chapter Two and Chapter Five, were part of this response to the needs of adults who had missed out on education and needed a 'second chance to learn'.

Sixth form colleges, like NSFC are distinguished from further education colleges because until recently, they catered only for the traditional sixth form intake providing mainly academic and some pre-vocational and vocational courses. Many were established by LEAs to replace sixth forms in schools that were too small to provide a comprehensive offer of courses.

Higher education has traditionally been defined as providing courses of study at an advanced level, normally that of degree or diploma. Before 1992 there was a binary system of higher education. This consisted of the old autonomous universities and much newer polytechnics established in 1966 under LEA control. The latter were public sector regional centres linked with industry and business.

In the late 1980s the boundaries between further and higher education were shifting. This was a result of franchising, a process where part or whole of the first year of a degree was taught in a further education college in partnership with higher education. In the 1988 Education Act further education colleges and sixth form colleges were given greater autonomy through devolved budgets. In 1992 the Higher and Further Education Act formally dissolved the distinction between universities and polytechnics and removed further and sixth form colleges from the control of LEAs. Both sectors were encouraged to expand and diversify.

Having clarified the key terms used throughout the thesis I will now move on to explain how the thesis is organised and the content of the chapters.

## 1.7 Outline and Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into nine chapters. After this introductory chapter, **Chapter Two** introduces the key issues in access education. It briefly locates access education historically. The chapter includes a review of some of the existing research in access education in order to identify the gaps, to frame this research and to examine key sociological issues that emerge. The chapter argues for the continuing importance of access education despite changes in status and form since its inception. The contribution that the study of access education can make to education policy sociology is also explored.

The search for an appropriate analytical framework for illustrating and understanding access education through a case study of a small, local policy initiative is undertaken in **Chapter Three**. This is achieved by reviewing the literature on the various recent debates about and approaches to policy and policy analysis in education. In rejecting various approaches I argue that the fate of this policy cannot be properly understood using top-down linear models of the policy process. It can be more fruitfully explored through a complex and cyclical analysis of policy.

**Chapter Four** marks the beginning of the empirical investigation. It details how the qualitative methods required for a policy cycle approach were employed in the field to conduct a longitudinal case study. It also deals with related methodological issues and problems encountered.

**Chapter Five** uses the policy cycle to conceptualise the historical and ideological development of access education. It traces the origins and beginnings of access education nationally and considers the arenas and agendas as well as key players within different contexts of the policy cycle. In this chapter I argue that access education initiated in the context of practice has been appropriated by key players in the context of influence and recontextualised into a new assemblage.

**Chapter Six** tells the teachers' story of how this policy came to be written and the factors that contributed to its demise. The social processes, compromises, voices and silences of text production are analysed and discussed against a backdrop of the micropolitics of NSFC and existing patterns of inequality in the local education market.

**Chapter Seven** draws on data collected to explore the different responses to 'policy-in-use' by the students. Such responses to how it was received, creatively reinterpreted, or rejected by students according to their interests, values and perceptions are analysed. The chapter also considers the choices made by the students about progression and what influenced these choices.

**Chapter Eight** continues to draw on data collected to focus on the context of outcomes. Students' different responses to career choices post-NSFC, in particular, experiences of higher education, further education and work are analysed. The focus of this chapter is to track the consequences of earlier responses to the policy over a longer time span.

The final chapter, **Chapter Nine** summarises the development of the thesis by using the findings to focus forward to current and future access policies in episode four of access education, the period from 1997 onwards. The chapter also includes an evaluation of the policy cycle approach and a brief discussion of policy recommendations. It considers the limitations of the research and asks what further questions need to be researched.

I turn now to Chapter Two, which situates this study within the history of access education and existing research.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Access Education: a Suitable Case for Treatment?**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the terrain of access education by reviewing some previous research and literature and discussing key issues that emerge. In order to contextualise this review a very brief historical overview of the roots and development of access education is provided. A much fuller account of the historical and ideological development of access education from the 1970s to the 1990s is provided in Chapter Five.

Research on 'access' falls into three main categories. Firstly, large-scale quantitative research analysing both local and national data on admissions to higher education to indicate which groups are under-represented. Secondly, smaller-scale studies evaluating access courses and related processes such as targeting social groups and the establishment of a national framework for their recognition. Thirdly, in-depth studies of the experiences of access students on their courses and in higher education. This brief, critical account of some of this research is intended to frame my investigation. Highlighting existing findings allows an articulation of how my own case study of the Higher Education Link Course (HELC) at Northside Sixth Form College (NSFC) fills some of the gaps, specifically some of the questions still unanswered and populations not yet investigated. It is also intended to illustrate how access education is an important lens through which to view changes in the relationship between society and education in general. Reasons for its continuing importance, despite changes in status and form since its inception, are provided.

#### **2.2 Providing a brief historical context**

Locating the beginnings of access education is no easy matter. As outlined in the introduction, access education is broadly defined to include a variety of schemes in higher, further and adult education aimed at preparing, mainly mature adults, for re-entry to the formal system and progression on to higher education. The first 'access courses' or 'access studies' are often assumed to have started in 1978. The Department of Education and Science (DES) invited six Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to set up one-year

preparatory courses aimed mainly, though not exclusively, at getting ethnic minorities into the teaching profession, youth work and social work. However, while the DES initiative provided impetus for such schemes, several pre-dated this invitation and had their roots in activities going back to the beginning of this century and before. Whilst access educators have a variety of motives and aims (Lieven, 1989), a central objective of the access movement was to develop working class education aimed at self-help and emancipation, in which students' own experiences as well as the needs of their communities were crucial.

### **2.2.1 Radical working class adult education traditions**

Those researching and writing about access education (Benn and Burton, 1995; Mangan, 1991; Parry, 1996) locate the roots of these schemes firmly in the radical traditions of adult education with its emphasis on a collective, emancipatory role. It is impossible to provide a comprehensive history of adult education but consideration of the above claim that access education is so rooted provides a focus. Historically, providing educational opportunities for working class adults has involved social and intellectual movements outside the formal system (Fieldhouse, 1996; Kelly, 1992). This is not only because state provision of education for all ages in England was developed late compared to other European powers (Green, 1990). It is also because in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries forms of working class self-education developed as alternatives to other forms of education whose aims were perceived as middle class control and incorporation. Fieldhouse (1996) describes what radical working class activists sought outside the formal education system –

They sought really useful knowledge, which would enable them to take political action, gain political power and bring about a radical transformation of society, and therefore they needed forms of education which they controlled. They tended to ignore or oppose the bourgeois-tainted elementary schools, Mechanics' Institutes, or the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; or to use them instrumentally.

(Fieldhouse, 1996:15)

So control by the working class was a crucial aspect of such education as well as its political nature. Much of it took the form of lectures, reading collectively-bought newspapers or political tracts and discussion groups. These activities took place in pubs, reading rooms, peoples' homes, workplaces and coffee houses and they were often organised by such groups as the Owenites, the Co-operative movement and the Chartists.

Such informal education was very different from Mechanics' Institutes, which began in the 1820s. These offered the main form of adult education provision based on the voluntary principle of self-improvement through evening classes. They were mainly founded and financed by wealthy, middle class patrons for a variety of philanthropic, self-interested and social motives. Women had to struggle to be admitted. Those women who were admitted were mainly middle class and did not receive equality of treatment (Benn, 1996).

### **2.2.2 Access education in the first half of the 20th century**

New forms of informal education were born in the early twentieth century. In 1902 the Workers' Education Association (WEA) was formed. In 1908 the Plebs League and the Labour College were also established as a more socialist alternative to Ruskin College (Drews and Fieldhouse, 1996). Ruskin College was set up in 1899 to provide residential education aimed at training working class men and women to take up leadership roles in their communities. The objectives of the WEA were to provide adult education and university education for working class men. This early form of access education, supported by the liberal educational establishment, was justified as 'a sound political investment against extremism' and 'to keep class conflict and full-blooded socialism at bay' (Fieldhouse, 1996:169). The WEA grew and flourished between 1903 and the end of the Second World War. One of the major criticisms, however, of its development was that it became increasingly middle class and that working class participation declined (Raybould, 1949). Additionally in these early 20th century forms of working class education, women were either excluded, or where there was access, the curriculum was differentiated and tended to reinforce women's domestic and child rearing role in the family (Benn, 1996).

Some early initiatives to open up access to higher education came from the universities themselves. In the 1870s the University Extension Movement was set in motion. This was initiated by Oxford, Cambridge and London universities who provided lecture courses to attract a wider range of students, including those from the working class. Despite such efforts, for financial and cultural reasons, the take-up was mainly from middle class students. From 1920 the Mature Matriculation Scheme provided opportunities for candidates without formal matriculation qualifications to enter

Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham universities on successfully passing a written examination. However research carried out on those applying between 1975 and 1980 shows that manual workers were under-represented among the applicants (Smithers and Griffin, 1986).

### **2.2.3 Links with Access Education in the 1970s.**

This brief overview of some of the key features of adult education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries indicates evidence of links with the philosophies of access provision in the 1970s. Such schemes were to open up educational opportunities for working class men and women. Importantly, they incorporated certain key principles of this working class, radical tradition. They aimed to draw on students' experiences, for the content to be controlled by students and to have collective empowerment as well as individual gain as a motive. They were organised for and with systemically disadvantaged groups. As part of these courses discussions would take place so that students understood how their individual educational experiences were linked to structural inequalities in society. The course content, structure and pedagogy were decided by the participants and tutors in consultation with the higher education institutions involved. In this sense they were a radical alternative to mainstream A level courses. They were also radical in that they aimed to challenge the exclusivity of higher education. They did take place within the formal system, mainly in further education colleges, which is at odds with the tradition of providing alternative provision. However as Corrigan (1992) points out, the early development of access education has been practice-led and developed with very little involvement at the level of central government.

### **2.2.4 Pockets of access activity in the 1970s**

Access education was developed by educators in the 1970s in different parts of the country. These 'pockets of activity' (Parry, 1996) were local, diverse and involved close co-operation between adult and further education and institutions of higher education to develop relevant curriculum and progression arrangements. Such courses were often supported by the Local Education Authorities. Specific groups were targeted, most

usually working class men and women and those from ethnic minorities. Such students were most likely to have failed to achieve the necessary qualifications for progression or left compulsory education at the minimum age. Some of the courses provided were 'women only' influenced by second wave feminism (Benn, 1996) and in recognition that women's needs were often marginalised in educational provision.

Access schemes usually took the form of one-year, full or part-time courses in further education colleges. They were designed to prepare adults for study in higher education. College tutors made links with local universities, or more usually, polytechnic tutors who undertook to accept such 'non-traditional' students onto degree courses on successful completion of the access course but without the standard A level qualifications.

### **2.2.5 Recontextualisation : from the 1970s to the 1990s**

In three decades the status and structure of access education has been transformed. It has been decontextualised from its original location as a minority provision controlled by educators mainly in further and adult education and inner city polytechnics and recontextualised as a major policy initiative. The ways in which access education has changed reflect the different concerns and priorities of successive governments. This will be considered in more detail in Chapter Five.

In the 1970s the Labour government was concerned about economic recession as well as the alienation and anger from black communities manifested by riots on the streets of inner cities (John, 1981). This, amongst other factors, gave rise to the letter of invitation from the DES in 1978 for LEAs to set up access courses to deal with the under-representation of black social workers, youth workers and teachers.

In the 1980s successive new-right, Conservative governments were concerned about Britain's economic competitiveness in the increasingly global economy. This concern was combined with worries about a demographic trough threatening the ability of universities to attract sufficient 18 year-old students. Access courses were felt by the Government to be a useful way of recruiting more students into higher education. Consequently, by 1987 access courses were officially recognised as the third route to higher education (DES, 1987). The first and second being A levels and vocational qualifications. The 1980s saw the fortunes and status of access education change

substantially. In the early 1980s access courses suffered from the discourses of derision, (Ball, 1990; Parry, 1996) being regarded as a possible threat to academic standards (Lindop Report, 1985). In the mid-1980s as a result of such attacks it became a much more self-conscious 'movement' (Parry, 1996) with the establishment of a national campaigning organisation '*The Forum for Access Studies*' in 1986. By 1989 the process of regulation and control began through the development of a national framework and the kitemarking of courses to ensure consistency of standards. Access had moved from the periphery to the centre stage of the government's policy agenda. In the late 1980s teachers in schools and colleges, inspired by the success of access courses for mature adults and frustrated by failure to reform A levels, set up access courses aimed at disadvantaged young people in the 16-19 age range. It was within this context that the HELC was established. Set within an A level framework it was aimed at young people from the NSFC's partner schools who had under-achieved. As a result such students were unable to enrol on A level courses. The HELC became part of a new wave of access courses. More detail of such schemes is given in Chapter Five.

In the early 1990s the government's priority was to expand higher education without an increase in unit cost and to end the binary system. Another priority was to introduce quasi markets to further and higher education as well as reducing the involvement of local education authorities. This resulted in universities opening their doors to students from more diverse backgrounds. New relationships between further and higher education saw the introduction of franchising with foundation years of degree courses, often modularised, being taught in further education colleges. This led to new modalities of access provision (Parry, 1996).

Since the election of a Labour government in 1997 social inclusion and exclusion have become a major concern. Commitments to widening participation at all levels of the educational system, to improving standards and to lifelong learning are at the centre of all major policies. Access is now on everyone's agenda (Fryer, 1997; Kennedy, 1997; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; The Learning Age, 1998; The Excellence Challenge, 2000). Access education can be deemed to be a success in numerical terms as it has expanded from a handful of courses and schemes in the 1970s to 600 access courses in 1992 (Berryman, 1992). Since 1992 there has been continued expansion through newer forms of access education. For example, credit frameworks and the Accreditation of Experiential

Learning (APEL), modularised, foundation years of degrees franchised to further education colleges, as well as traditional access courses have all been established. Many questions related to evaluating this success and expansion have informed research into access education and it is to this research that I will now turn.

### **2.3 Researching 'Access' and Access Education**

A comprehensive history of access education and a large-scale research project to evaluate its effectiveness are still to be undertaken. Until very recently, one of the problems of judging the efficacy of access education in terms of the objectives of its advocates has been the lack of reliable national statistics, in particular, the social composition of students on access courses (Benn and Burton, 1995; Davies, 1997; Wakefield, 1993). These data have not been collected systematically. Additionally, if one of the main objectives of access education was to improve the take-up by groups under-represented in higher education then the collection of data by admissions tutors indicating that students have applied through an access route as well as their social class background would seem crucial. Unfortunately while a great deal of data has been collected on admissions to higher education there has been no agreed method of categorising applicants who apply through the access route. It is regrettable that the contribution of access courses to this increasing participation by more and different students since the 1970s cannot be accurately estimated.

Existing research on 'access' and access education falls into three main categories. Firstly there exists large-scale quantitative research analysing both local and national data on admissions to higher education in relation to the representation of working class, ethnic minority and female students (Egerton and Halsey, 1993; Modood, 1993, 1998; Modood and Shiner 1994; Singh, 1990; Taylor 1992, 1993). To this category I add a recent review of policy and practice in widening access to higher education (Jary, 2001).

Secondly, there are numerous small scale studies evaluating individual courses (Lucas and Ward, 1983, 1985) monitoring the social composition of access courses (Benn and Burton, 1995; Millins, 1984; Wakefield, 1993) and comparing success rates of access students and traditional students (Bourner and Hamed, 1987; Lucas and Ward 1985; Yates and Davies, 1986) as well as a study of change in the motives of access educators

(Benn and Burton, 1995). This category also contains an evaluation study of the formation and implementation of the national framework for the recognition of access courses (Davies and Parry, 1993).

Thirdly, a few in-depth studies of the experiences of access students on their courses and in higher education have been carried out (Green and Webb, 1997; Rosen, 1990; West, 1996). Two related studies of 16–19 year old students, though not access students, are useful and relevant to my focus and will be referred to in this thesis. The first tracks the school-to-work transitions of ten young people in a youth training scheme studying the factors affecting their career choices (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). The second is a study of the choices and constraints facing a small cohort of young people in south London in their post compulsory schooling (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000).

I will now provide a critical review of some of the research outlined above. The research and evidence provided spans 1984 to 2001 and in this time the discourses and terminology of access education has shifted and changed. However, there are continuities as well as discontinuities in the concerns of access educators reflected in research over this period.

### **2.3.1 Who Has Access to Higher Education?**

Taking a long-term view over this century Egerton and Halsey (1993) identify three features in the history of access to higher education since 1900. They suggest that there has been a considerable expansion of tertiary provision; no reduction of relative social class inequality but there has been a significant reduction in gender inequality.

They used a sample of 25,000 men and women between the ages of 20 and 50, drawn from the General Household Survey for 1985, 1986 and 1987. The research also included details of the prestige of the institution attended and the age of attaining the qualification. Most studies use only academic qualifications as measures of tertiary educational attainment, but type of institution is also important in maintaining or reducing inequalities because the most prestigious institutions may be accessible only to the most privileged groups. Using a three-point version of Goldthorpe's (1980) social class schema, they found social-class inequalities in access to all educational institutions (universities, polytechnics and colleges) with the service class having an advantage over both the intermediate and the manual working class. Absolute access had increased for



all, but the service class has maintained its relative advantage in both universities and polytechnics. They found that students from service-class backgrounds were more likely to take degree courses in universities than working-class and intermediate-class students, who were more likely to take them in a polytechnic or college of further education. This supports the thesis that more advantaged groups tend to dominate more prestigious institutions. They sum up -

The overall picture for social class is of unchanging service class advantage. The children of managerial or professional families are more likely to gain access to university, more likely to have obtained the most prestigious qualification, a degree, at a university and more likely to have qualified earlier in life than people from an intermediate or manual class background.

(Egerton and Halsey, 1993: 189)

They did find, however, that the expansion in tertiary education has benefited women and it seems likely that women's educational achievement will soon be on a par with that of men at under-graduate level. Subsequent evidence suggests that women's participation overtook that of men on under-graduate degree courses between 1996-1997 (HESA, 1997). Egerton and Halsey's focus was on social class and gender without considering the connection between the two. It would have been interesting to know whether it is working class women who have benefited.

### **2.3.2 Ethnic Minority Representation**

Egerton and Halsey (1993) did not include ethnicity in this particular study. Since the late 1970s there has also been concern about the under-representation of ethnic minorities in higher education. Such concern led to the Labour government in 1978 issuing the letter of invitation to LEAs to set up access studies. However Madood (1993) in his survey of UCCA and PCAS data refutes the long-standing claim of under-representation of ethnic minorities. The picture he provides is complex with the over-representation of some groups and the under-representation of others. In the PCAS system, Africans have a representation of more than 300% in relation to their proportion in the population, followed by Indians, East African Asians and Chinese. Even black Caribbean and Pakistani students are over-represented. Only Bangladeshi students and the category 'other blacks' have an under-representation greater than that for whites. There are gender differences with Caribbean men and Bangladeshi women most likely to be under-

represented. He also indicates that ethnic minorities tend to be concentrated in the new universities in London and the Midlands.

Madood makes a case for targeting poorly motivated white working class populations through access measures. This is justified, he argues, by the fact that virtually all working class minority groups achieve better examination results than their white working class peers. Undoubtedly such targeting of white working class is necessary as well as provision targeted at minority ethnic working class groups, like Bangladeshis particularly women, who are still significantly under-represented. At NSFC the tutors on the HELC were concerned at the under-representation of white working class students applying for the course. In my cohort of twelve students, nine out of twelve were African Caribbean and black African, four male and five female, and none of the remainder were white working class students.

## **2.4 More Recent Trends**

The surveys above indicate some progress in opportunities in access to higher education especially for women and some minority ethnic groups. However the evidence is that working class students are more likely to be concentrated in the least prestigious institutions. Such institutions also tend to have the poorest resources and lowest retention rates (HEFCE, 1999). This evidence indicates the continued need to target under-represented groups, like Caribbean, working class males and working class Bangladeshi females as well as white working class groups through access measures. It also indicates a need for policies to provide not just access to higher education, but also accessibility of the curriculum. This requires both better resourcing levels to improve learning support systems and a change in teaching and learning culture in higher education.

More recent figures indicate that the massive expansion of higher education which took place from 1987-1994 has now slowed down (HESA, 2000). This involves a 'plateauing off' for applications from all social groups but is most marked for the unskilled category (UCAS, 1999). Possible reasons for this include the replacement of grants with loans and the introduction of fees. This needs to be supported or disproved by research. However it is interesting that in Scotland, where fees have been abolished, applications continue to rise (UCAS, 2000).

## **2.5 Are Access Courses Recruiting 'Disadvantaged' Groups?**

In order to measure whether access courses are successfully targeting under-represented groups research on the social composition of courses has been undertaken. This has been investigated through small-scale studies. Millins (1984) evaluated the Department of Education and Science (DES) initiative to develop access studies in 1978. He compared the parental backgrounds of students accepted into higher education with those of 1,830 access students. He found that access courses had been successful in recruiting students from social categories 3 and 4 compared to categories 1 and 2 for mainstream students. This was evidence that access courses were successful in attracting more working class students. He also found that of 1, 830 access students studied, 51% were of Caribbean origin, 5% of Asian origin and 37% were white British. Women outnumbered men by 3-1. There had been no shortage of applicants. 67 % of students were successful and of these 94% went onto higher education (Millins, 1984).

This evaluation of early access initiatives has been used as a benchmark for other research on the social composition of access courses. For example Wakefield's (1993) research, for which she visited 27 Access Courses in 11 institutions, compared the data she collected to the 'social categories' used by Millins (1984). From her analysis of 391 completed questionnaires, she found a smaller proportion of women students than he did although they were still the largest group overall. Wakefield attributes the change for courses pre-1983 focussing on the caring professions, Humanities and social sciences to those 'second wave' courses in maths, science, business studies, engineering and computing. In the latter part of the 1980s the proportion of male participants was three times that of females. This shift in favour of male students was matched by a shift away from the participation of ethnic minorities. She found a participation rate less than half that found by Millins (1984). However their level of representation is still higher than their proportion in the population as a whole. She attributes this change to expansion outside the urban areas of the original 'pockets of activity'. She also quotes a survey by McGivney (1990: 145) which claims that some separate courses for ethnic minorities have been hijacked by the black middle classes as social class criteria had not been applied in targeting.

From the data Wakefield collected she found it difficult to conclude that access courses were succeeding to attract working class students. Using Goldthorpe's social

class categories to analyse her sample it seems that access courses were attracting a majority of adults whose own employment would categorise them as non-manual. (classes I, 2 and 3 in the Registrar General's classification). She found high proportions of students from class 3 (routine non-manual or clerical) but also substantial numbers from amongst former manual workers especially amongst male students. She concludes her study –

If access courses are to expand, the social class profile of students, as well as their gender and ethnicity, should be monitored and different groups targeted to prevent provision from beginning to mirror the existing social class inequalities in Higher Education.

(Wakefield, 1993: 228)

Wakefield's study is important because it raises important questions about the need to widen rather than merely increase access. She warns that comparisons with Millen's categories need to be treated with caution. This highlights the problems of comparing data across time when different categories have been used. Additionally social class categorisations like Goldthorpe's are not finely tuned to women's occupations and therefore the use of class 3 as routine non-manual may include what are in reality working class, female occupations. Such issues do serve to emphasise the need for a rigorous national survey to monitor the social composition of students on access courses.

A similar survey by Benn and Burton (1993) also encountered many of the same difficulties in coming to definite conclusions about changes in the social composition of access courses. Their study of 1,471 such students in 1992/3 had similar findings to those of Wakefield (1993). Access courses seemed to be attracting students mainly from social classes 2 and 3 and under-recruiting from classes 4 and 5 in relation to their proportions in the population. They found that access courses were accepting mainly mature women with few formal qualifications. Ethnic minorities were represented in proportions higher than in the general population. Benn and Burton (1993) felt that for courses aimed at attracting minority groups this was arguably not good enough. Like Wakefield (1993) they recommend caution in drawing conclusions from their statistics as there are problems both with their collection and the social class categories used, especially in relation to women's employment.

## 2.6 Targeting - Rhetoric Rather than Reality?

The second part of Benn and Burton's research (1993) was to investigate the attitudes of course directors on access courses and Authorised Validating Agencies (AVAs) to targeting specific groups, under-represented in higher education. With the development of a national framework of recognition for access to higher education courses in 1989 the characteristics of groups to be targeted were drawn up –

All access programmes are different, being responsive to local need and hence designed for their own particular target group, institutional provider and geographic area. Nevertheless they are specifically directed by the Framework to target and recruit mature students, women, social classes D and E, and black/ethnic minorities.

(Benn and Burton, 1995:446 quoting from CVCP and CNNA, 1989 para.39)

Benn and Burton feel that the roots of access are firmly located in a commitment to targeting systemically disadvantaged groups. They wished to discover whether such a commitment was shared by programme directors and AVAs. They sent out questionnaires to 141 courses and to 39 AVAs. They found that the picture on targeting was contradictory. While most said that there was targeting of certain groups there seemed to be little evidence of the use of targets or equal opportunities policies with which to evaluate success. Emphasis in the courses was placed on individual needs and support rather than on the generic cultural experiences of groups. 72% of the programmes looked for enthusiasm or motivation when recruiting students with only 8.3% using criteria related to the target group. A key question in the questionnaire was whether the prime purpose of access was individual opportunity or to change the position of certain groups in society. Two-thirds of the respondents opted for the former. Targeting was present in the rhetoric but not the reality of access, they concluded. Benn and Burton indicate that there was a complex web of influences operating on access provision in the mid-1990s. The two most important factors they cite to explain this shift in motives are, firstly, moves to promote modularisation and credit-rating on access courses. They see this as promoting individualised student-led rather than course-led programmes of study. Secondly, they feel that a decade and a half of New Right individualism has had its effect on provision and that the social purpose of adult education has been replaced with bureaucratic notions of 'widening the market' where students become regarded as individual consumers.

Both these studies by Wakefield (1993) and Benn and Burton (1995) indicate a change in the social composition of students on access courses. Due to problems of validity and reliability it is impossible to claim categorically that there has been a shift away from the recruitment of working class students in favour of middle class female and ethnic minority students. What is certain is that this requires further research and monitoring. In Chapter Seven there is a discussion of whether the students in the cohort under study were in fact 'truly disadvantaged'. Their backgrounds illustrate the complex inter-weavings of ethnicity, social class and gender and prior educational experiences as well as their relative nature, which all need to be taken into account when attempting to establish educational and social disadvantage.

Another study in the category of small-scale evaluations was carried out by Davies and Parry (1993). They provide a narrative account of the process of establishing a national framework to recognise access courses by providing them with a national currency and ensuring their quality. Through an analysis of documentary sources, interviewing key participants and observing meetings they provide a detailed account of the operation of the scheme at the national, regional and local levels between September 1990 and August 1991. Their focus was five case studies of agencies authorised to recognise access courses on behalf of central authorities. They provide a revealing account of the 'tensions, ambiguities and uncertainties' of the policy process of kitemarking access courses. A number of tensions in the policy making process are outlined in their study. Such tensions were inherent in bringing into a national framework small practice-led, autonomous access initiatives. The challenge was to ensure quality while safeguarding diversity in order to meet local needs. Davies and Parry (1993) also add some evidence to the notion that access is a useful lens through which to observe the educational system when they state –

Many of the issues which confronted the framework, which shaped its identity and evolution, were the same as those which challenged the system as a whole, and in some cases they anticipated debates and developments which were to feature on the larger policy stage.

(Davies and Parry, 1993:2)

The HELC, as it remained within an A level framework and was aimed at 16-19 year olds, was not subject to the process of kitemarking. However, changes in the system as a whole to which Davies and Parry (1993) refer, impinged on the ability of teachers at

NSFC to sustain the HELC. The incorporation and marketisation of further education and sixth form colleges and the introduction of new formula funding through the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) affected the resourcing of the HELC. The rationalisation and control of funding closed some of the spaces that could be exploited by teachers like those at NSFC to set up flexible arrangements for students leading to opportunities for study in higher education.

## **2.7 Researching Access Students' Experiences**

A few in-depth studies of the experiences of access students in higher education exist. For this reason my own research of 16-19 year old access students experiences of the HELC, higher education and employment is an important contribution to this area of research.

Rosen (1990) surveyed the experiences and employment destinations of eighty six former students who entered the Polytechnic of North London through access courses in local colleges of further education. The majority of these were from ethnic minority, working class backgrounds and were women. In terms of student performance, seventy-one were successful in their degrees and diplomas and of these students all but four were in employment related to their courses: that is, teaching or social work. This is a very positive result in line with recruiting more ethnic minority into such occupations. Rosen concludes her study –

When provided with an opening, "step up" "a foot on the ladder" "a stepping stone" and not too discouraging an environment, the strengths of the "untapped talent" in the black and working class communities will do the rest.  
(Rosen, 1990: 100)

While most students were appreciative of the support and teaching they had received some were highly critical of the lack of understanding from some staff of the needs of non-traditional, mature students. In particular they mentioned the stigma attached to coming through the access route and the lack of understanding by some staff of the skills and knowledge covered on an access course. They expressed the need for more student-centred pedagogy and learning support. This has implications for all institutions of higher education responding to the needs of mature and non-traditional students. One of the intentions of the HELC, the focus of this thesis, was to produce students who were both autonomous and collaborative learners who could cope with the demands of study in

higher education. The data collected, analysed in Chapter Seven, supports the findings above about both a lack of understanding from higher education tutors of students needs and a pedagogy and culture that was inaccessible. This highlights the mismatch in these respects between access courses and higher education, a point that is taken up more thoroughly in future chapters.

## **2.8 Adults, Motivation and Higher Education**

West (1996) carried out a longitudinal study, primarily of fifteen mature students on access or Foundation programmes in Medway and Thanet in Kent. Using individual interviews with these students and drawing on their personal journals he documented their evolving stories of self, motivation and educational biography over a four-year period. He drew on sociological, feminist and psychoanalytical frameworks. He used particular case studies to illustrate and explore male and female, black and white students' different responses to change and their experiences of learning. How male students responded to the collapse of employment prospects to re-negotiate new identities and masculinities through the access process was also a focus. He was interested in the implications of such experiences for the development of a more diverse and responsive system of higher education. He provides interesting data on the effects of market mechanisms and changes in funding methodologies on both further and higher education and how these have penetrated staff-student relationships in negative ways. Students were disappointed and frustrated by limited resources, poor retention rates, institutional uncertainties and poor teacher morale. However they were also excited by the opportunities to gain cultural capital and social mobility in higher education. This research is useful because it provides rich, biographical accounts of individuals' educational experiences and the development of the 'self' and subjectivity. It is longitudinal and tracks changes in students' identities over time. However, as a result of this emphasis on individual development no analysis is provided of how many students completed their courses, their social composition or their destinations in terms of employment. This would have made interesting reading and provided an overview. My own research covers an even longer time span of seven years, from 1992 to 1999. This serves to fill a gap in the existing research by providing a longer-term view of the policy effects of access education than either Rosen or West's studies. Neither does West (1996)



include policy recommendations by drawing on evidence from the study. How higher education needs to change and how access courses can better suit communities like those on the Medway are implicitly but not substantially explored (Ainley, 1997).

## **2.9 Alternative Routes, Alternative Identities**

Another study of access students' changing identities was conducted by Green and Webb (1997). They studied ninety-two students from seven institutions who formed part of an 'Alternative Entry to Higher Education' project. They wanted to discover the ways in which these students defined and re-defined their identities at three points in their transition to higher education: firstly, their identity on leaving school; secondly, making the decision to enter higher education; and thirdly their identity as higher education students. Drawing on a typology similar to that developed by Ball (1990, 1994a) they relate identity development to five current political and educational discourses held by - academic traditionalists, marketeers, utilitarian trainers, liberal meritocrats and the access movement (Williams, 1997). When these alternative entrants left school their educational identities fell into four categories. Category one, the majority who felt at school it had been communicated to them that higher education was 'for someone else'. They now understood this as a consequence of structural inequalities rather than individual failings. In this way their positioning coincided with the discourses of the access movement. This targeted ethnic minority, female or working class students, like them, as disadvantaged groups for access measures.

The second category, twenty-two out of twenty-nine of whom were women, were characterised as 'deserving returners' who saw themselves as having the academic potential at school but not realising it, due mainly to lack of confidence. Such identities coalesced with the discursive positioning of students associated with the liberal meritocratic assumption that as they had talent they should be given the opportunity to develop it.

The third category had had some academic success at school. For a variety of reasons they had not followed this through by choosing higher education at eighteen. A tiny fourth category of young entrants, including some under twenty one years, was identified. They were interesting because most alternative entry students are regarded as mature students. They were not followed through in this study. This group had always

intended to progress to higher education but had sought alternative entry routes because they had acquired formal qualifications in unorthodox ways and were regarded by admissions tutors as 'non-standard'. This group correspond more closely with the cohort under study in this research. It is regrettable that they were not followed through and this makes this study important in filling a gap about the experiences of younger alternative entrants.

The next stage of the analysis was for Green and Webb (1997) to consider the triggers to these post-school identities that led to higher education being considered as an option. There was no clear linear pattern as triggers were multi-faceted but in all identity positions 'work' was the most frequently cited trigger. This was either that they had work but were not happy with such work or success at work had made them more ambitious or being made redundant had forced change upon them. The second most cited reason was initial contact with courses, often non-vocational and part-time, taken in further education colleges. These had led to further study. The third trigger cited mainly by women students was changes in family circumstances like divorce or children growing up.

Green and Webb (1997) found that the identities these students developed in higher education were complex. The research took place when the binary divide still existed. Students viewed higher education hierarchically and thought that old universities were 'posher.'

The idea of going to university I found too daunting. The university seemed posher than the polytechnic; where you would have to be really clever. I thought the polytechnic would be less traditional and more accessible.

(Carol quoted in Green and Webb, 1997:146)

Most (70%) chose to apply to new universities in their local areas because, apart from issues to do with convenience, they felt access entrants were more normalized and in some cases 'idealized' in these institutions. This corresponds with the cohort in this study. Ten out of the twelve attended higher education, two only briefly, but of these ten, only two attended 'old' universities. However of these students attending new universities only three were in London. This marks a difference with the mature students above who chose local universities.

In conclusion, Green and Webb (1997) state that these alternative entrants had

fluid and varied identities and did not accept the positioning made available by any one set of practices in the discourse of access. They often accepted their positioning as abnormal and illegitimate entrants to higher education on the one hand but understood this as deficiencies in the system not themselves. They felt that they had a right to such access in the interests of equity. Elements of all discourses contributed to the ways they saw themselves. For example, some students had the idea that there should be a return on the personal and financial investment they had made in terms of more rewarding careers, reflecting a position supported by the 'marketeers'.

This research is useful, linking as it does the experiences of alternative entrants to the different discourses about higher education and who it is for. It also analyses some of the triggers that changed students' identities and made higher education a possibility. Most importantly it demonstrates how the access educational process itself heightened students' awareness of structural inequalities which contributed to their position as alternative entrants.

## **2.10 What is to be Learnt From Such Research?**

This review of some of the key areas of research into access education reveals that it is an under-researched and theorised area in the sociology of education. This is partly explained by the fragmented nature of such provision as 'pockets of activity' (Parry, 1996) and until recently its marginal status. The price to be paid for these diverse and practice-led policies has been the failure to collect reliable, systematic, national statistics on the progression of access students and their social characteristics. Key issues have emerged from the research that has been carried out that continue to be debated. There is some evidence of a change in the motives of access educators away from targeting under-represented groups to more emphasis on providing individualised opportunities. This leads to the question of whether access education has lost its emancipatory way and has begun to reflect mainstream provision (Diamond, 1999).

Evidence on the social composition of access courses is inconclusive. Therefore it is impossible to claim that access courses have been highjacked by middle class students and now mirror existing inequalities. There is some evidence (Wakefield, 1993) that the participation of ethnic minorities has declined. Modood (1993) provides evidence that this is not reflected in the participation levels of most ethnic minority

groups in higher education that provides some basis for optimism. However, he indicates that most ethnic minority students are concentrated in inner city, 'new' universities in London and the Midlands, evidence supported by Green and Webb (1997). This raises questions about equity and access to elite universities and supports the notion of 'perverse access' (Jary, 2001). The in-depth studies provide rich accounts through the narratives of alternative entry students' experiences, motivations and identities. They show how experiences are often contradictory and identities are constructed using positions available to students through a number of different discourses of higher education and whom it is for. They provide evidence that the access educational process is important to students as it raises their consciousness of how structural factors contributed to their disadvantage. Students saw the benefits of acquiring cultural capital and social mobility but at the same time, many experienced higher education as 'alien territory'. This provides support for the assertion that access to higher education is matched in importance to accessibility of the curriculum and culture of higher education (Leicester, 1993). What is not provided by these in-depth studies are the experiences of younger access students of their courses and higher education. Tracking students' experiences over time to give an indication of policy effects in the longer term is also necessary. My research also combines an engagement with the issues of access education but within a policy sociology framework.

The findings outlined above also indicate that large-scale research on access education as well as access education itself is still necessary. The final section of this chapter examines arguments for why this is the case.

## **2.11 A Useful Lens to View the Whole Educational System?**

Access education is interesting sociologically because it is relational. It can only be understood when it is viewed in relation to the rest of the educational system. Whether access measures are needed or not tells us about the openness or closure of the whole educational system –

The delineation of access education therefore will always be relative to the openness or closure of other forms of organised learning and, as elsewhere, will reflect the priorities, interests and demands expressed at any one time.

(Parry, 1996: 4)

This connects centrally with the major concern of the sociology of education, to explain the persistence of social class, gender and ethnic inequalities in the educational system despite a plethora of reforms. Access education provides a useful vantage point from which to view the whole system. It leads us to ask questions about why the educational system failed under-represented groups during their period of compulsory schooling that such remedial action is required through access measures to prepare students for progression. It raises issues and questions which serve to challenge and disturb the exclusiveness of higher education, especially the elite sector. It is in this sector that service class advantage persists (Egerton and Halsey, 1993; Jary, 2001). Yet research evidence indicates that marginalised groups self-select new universities in inner city areas because they are perceived as less threatening (Green and Webb, 1997; Madood, 1993). If the privilege of the elite sector is not challenged then this could lead to what Woodrow (2000) has called the 'Social Exclusion Model' –

This scenario produces a ghettoised HE sector irretrievably divided along social class lines by ability to pay, with rich institutions getting richer and poorer ones getting poorer. Privilege is preserved and low income participation restricted to the least expensive HEIs, with the exception of a talent-spotted few who serve to justify the survival of an inequitable system.  
(Woodrow, 2000: 4)

Policy recommendations to avoid this possible scenario will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

The changes in the status and form of access education have taken place against the background of the move to a mass system of higher education, at least numerically, with the doubling of student numbers since 1980. This trajectory of access education as policy and practice sheds important light on how policies are made and re-made over time to deal with different agendas. It illustrates how policies that began as local, diverse and practice-led can be re-created or recontextualised by governments to meet very different social, economic and political requirements. This demonstrates that policy making is conflictual, contradictory and often contingent. In particular 'access' and access education provide a lens to consider the shifting meanings and the ambiguities contained in the binaries of 'selectivity and equity', 'elite and mass', 'quality and access' and 'traditional and non-traditional'. As Williams states: such words are used as

‘shorthand descriptors of who should or should not be let into what sort of academia and on what terms’ (Williams, 1997:25).

Finally access to higher education as an area of study is important because it throws light on the crucial transitions made by such ‘non-traditional’ students from college to higher education and into work. It highlights decision making and choices in post-compulsory education and the factors or triggers affecting such decisions. It enables a study of the possibilities and constraints in such educational biographies. In so doing it allows an interrogation of the key issues of access policy and practice that have been introduced and discussed here and that are to be uncovered in this thesis. My research on 16-19 year old students’ in-depth experiences of an access course and the transition to higher and further education and work therefore makes a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge, outlined above, on access education. Adding the voices of younger alternative entrants and the ways in which they make such policies ‘their own’ through their actual experiences of such targeted provision is an important addition to policy sociology. Looking at the longer-term effects of different initial responses to an access policy is also an important contribution made by this research. Much policy research, as Bowe et al, (1992:7) point out, focuses only on policy formulation and neglects the longer-term implications of policy effects over time. The following chapter reviews the different models of policy analysis with a view to finding the most appropriate framework for the study of the HELC and one cohort of its students.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Contrasting Approaches To Policy and Policy Analysis**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers the various recent debates about and approaches to policy and policy analysis in education. The aim is to find the most useful approach for illustrating and understanding access education via one case study of a small, local policy initiative, the HELC. As outlined in Chapter Two this course was part of a much wider movement aimed at increasing participation in higher education for under-represented groups. The search for clear definitions of policy and its analysis is not easy as Ball outlines –

One of the conceptual problems currently lurking within much policy research and policy sociology is that more often than not analysts fail to define conceptually what they mean by policy. The meaning of policy is taken for granted and theoretical and epistemological dry rot is built into the analytical structures they construct.

(Ball, 1994a:15)

#### **3.2 Traditional Approaches to Policy and Policy Analysis**

Traditionally, definitions of policy and policy making have been linked to the activities of Governments -

Policy analysis is finding out what governments do, why they do it and what difference it makes.

(Dye, 1976:1)

Different positions can be defined historically in terms of competing and contrasting sociological traditions. These positions articulate different conceptualisations of the state and its power. Two main traditions are often identified: pluralism and its directly opposed Marxism. In the former tradition, of which there are several variants, the state is often viewed as neutral, arbitrating between different and competing interest groups holding unequal amounts of power. Politics is regarded as a process of bargaining between such groups and government to reach a compromise. The issues of the time determine how these groups constitute and re-constitute themselves. In this model no social group is excluded, in theory, from achieving political power. This could be regarded as politically naïve as it ignores the skill base and social processes involved in such bargaining.

Until the 1980s, pluralism, was the dominant theoretical approach to educational policy

analysis in the UK. Kogan (1975, 1978, 1983) is regarded as the leading proponent. He has provided sophisticated accounts of the politics of educational change between 1945 and the early 1980s. His model has been widely influential including its acknowledged use in a major study of educational change over the same period in Scotland by McPherson and Raab (1988). Their research focuses on how educationalists, officials and politicians decided for and against policy options. They found some support for characterising education policy making as pluralist –

We have observed that all the major formal groups since 1945 have had successes and failures both in proposing and opposing policies, and that the effect has been to take the system in a direction that no one group could be said originally to have wanted.

(McPherson and Raab, 1988:482)

However, they point out that their findings are inconclusive as they found evidence of both centralism and partnership in policy making.

In Kogan's model there are three sets of agents in the educational policy making system which he regards as quasi autonomous. These are the then Department of Education and Science, Local Education Authorities and teachers' organisations. These key players, he claims, invoke pluralism themselves in seeking to explain their relationship with each other. In this way pluralism is both a description of the system and 'in' the system. This national system is held in equilibrium, Kogan asserts, as all dispersed centres of decision making have the statutory or professional authority to control their respective domains. Such pluralism is rooted specifically in the English experience where historically central government was but one of several major sponsors of educational provision. Such dispersal of power allows local diversity and works against centralised control. This power sharing across central and local government and teachers' organisations implying some degree of shared purpose and power has been conceptualised in the pluralist model as 'partnership'. This term is however disputed. Kogan's reluctance to describe such power sharing as 'partnership' arises from his studies in which though power is dispersed it is not evenly dispersed, with the Department of Education and Science as a 'senior partner' wielding determinant authority and greater power. Kogan's research has also led him to assert that the pluralism of the system does not extend power to all the main actors in the processes of education. His approach is regarded as fruitful because it allows for complexity and indeterminacy in



policy making –

The sources of policy generation are so difficult to locate, let alone place in any logical pattern, that detecting the changes in values, or the pressures by which change is effected, is more a matter of art than of analysis.

(Kogan, 1975: 23)

He also understands the difficulties of defining 'educational policy' and usefully extends the idea of policy making to include the interactions between teachers and students in schools and colleges, rather than just the activities of local and central government and teachers' organisations.

Kogan's pluralism has been critiqued by other pluralists. For example, Salter and Tapper (1981) claim he failed to explain adequately the forces that lie behind the apparent balancing of rival interest groups as well as an inability to explain educational change. Marxists have also critiqued pluralist approaches for playing down the influence of the needs of capital in shaping policy and consequently presenting an incomplete picture of the policy-making arena. Marxists regard pluralism as merely the study of the operation of different interest groups, suggesting that it is a relatively uncritical acceptance of the partnership paradigm. Dale (1989) is critical of pluralists who concentrate solely on education politics, narrowly conceived as micro issues, without reference to the politics of education which emphasise macro influences.

Pluralism is also criticised for its vagueness which leads Dale to claim that it is less an account of distribution of power and influence than an implicit statement of how things ought to be in Western democratic societies. Ozga (1987) also asserts that traditional pluralism has had its day as pluralist inspired theorising about education policy failed to cope adequately with the degree of political conflict and change in the 1980s.

For my purposes, the pluralist model of policy making is not entirely appropriate for studying a small policy initiated by teachers to provide access to higher education for non-traditional students. It is a model which has at its core the processes of decision making between powerful key players: the government, the local education authorities and the teachers organisations. My research was mainly to focus on small players rather than powerful key players as the access movement, of which this policy was part, was practitioner-led, local and developed initially outside the central state. To many of those involved in its development it was intended to be counter-hegemonic. One of its main aims was to challenge the exclusivity of an elite system of higher education. The analytic

emphasis in researching access education was with attempts to counter structural inequalities which are not a central part of a pluralist agenda. Teachers at NSFC wished to extend opportunities for access to higher education to disadvantaged students in the 16-19 age-range. The activities of the key players mentioned above did impinge on their ability to continue to provide such opportunities, but this is not the main focus of my study. A model is required that allows a detailed account of how and why the teachers set up the course and subsequently how the policy was played out over time through one cohort's educational biographies. An emphasis on localised complexity and distorted power relations is not one of the strengths of a pluralist model or of its empirical application. For these reasons I chose not to employ a traditional pluralist approach.

### **3.3 Varieties of Marxism**

The second traditional approach includes the various interpretations of Marxism which hold that the state operates in the interests of capital in the last instance but with debates about how the ruling class actually rules: relative autonomy and the role of ideology (Althusser 1971; Milliband, 1968; Poulantzas, 1978). The state is not regarded narrowly as the executive committee of the bourgeoisie as in classical Marxism or as the activities of governments and teachers organisations as in pluralism but :

it is a set of publicly financed institutions, neither separately nor collectively necessarily in harmony, confronted by certain basic problems deriving from its relationship with capitalism, with one branch, the government, having responsibility for ensuring the continuing prominence of those problems on its agenda.

(Dale, 1989:57)

In education policy analysis this perspective is best exemplified by the work of Ozga and Dale, who prefer the term neo-Marxist. Their focus has been to relate the politics of education to basic problems confronting the state in capitalist society. These are the support of the capitalist accumulation process and guaranteeing continued expansion and the legitimisation of the system' (Dale, 1994: 36). This approach has involved tracing the contexts, nature and consequences of state involvement in education. Ozga and Dale both reject a simple determination or correspondence in favour of a model which indicates some autonomy as well as complexity and contradiction in the demands made on

education and their resolution. For Dale (1986, 1989) this has resulted in the development of a theory of the educational state apparatus and how it operates. In this work he grounds his theory empirically through the use of case studies which he feels indicate key turning points in the politics of education indicating increased state control over the teaching profession and the content of education. It was the William Tyndale case in 1975 which represented for Dale the final defeat of the post-war progressive consensus. Though whether there was such a consensus is contested (Morley and Rassool, 1999; Whitty, 1994). For Dale this defeat was signalled by teachers moving from 'licensed' to 'regulated autonomy' to create a balance between the functions of education in a new economic and political situation.

Ozga's work has focused on two main areas of policy. Firstly she studies how different policies have attempted to shape the teaching profession in England. She looks at how the contradictory aims of education for state and society place considerable pressures on teachers' work. This, she claims, makes teachers' work and its management unstable. Secondly, in her research with Gewirtz into 'Elites in Education Policy - making' (Gewirtz and Ozga, 1990) they seek to re-assess the pluralist account of partnership in English education since 1944 by providing an alternative historical interpretation from a statist or state-centred Marxist approach. They used archive sources and interviews with key figures from the period to study why some values and policies were promoted rather than others. Using historical evidence, they indicate the educational background of officials, which they feel has been neglected in pluralist accounts in favour of political appointees, revealing that most were part of an elite who had attended Oxbridge, mainly Balliol. Such men were engaged in making educational policy for schools that neither they themselves had attended nor their children would attend. This account provided by Ozga and Gewirtz challenges the pluralist idea of partnership and provides an alternative view of -

a closed policy community, operating an already agreed agenda, excluding alternatives and limiting outside access to policy making.

(Gewirtz and Ozga, 1990:47)

Marxist approaches to educational policy analysis have been criticised for their emphasis on the macro – which often leads to abstract theorising rather than empirical study (Hargreaves, 1985). Such abstraction results in an inability to deal with local complexity and relate this adequately to the state's agenda in dealing with core problems

of capitalism. Power (1995) examines Ozga's claim that state centred theory is capable of providing a coherent and theoretically adequate explanation of education policy making. Power uses the example of four very different schools which opted for grant maintained status. She takes one of the core problems for the educational state apparatus, emphasised in a statist approach: that of producing an appropriately stratified workforce. She shows that these schools indicate a range of very different responses' to recent educational reforms. None of these responses which included a return to traditional academic values in one, the promotion of scientific and technical education for girls in another, can be adequately explained using state centred theory despite its claim to deal with such contradictory responses. Power concludes that such Marxist approaches need to be reconstructed in order to survive. She also suggests that they can possibly learn from post-structuralism in which approach the binary of macro / micro is rendered more difficult to sustain.

Marxists are also condemned by pluralists for misrepresenting evidence by choosing only to use that which fits their a priori assertion about the centrality of the state. Dale is criticised by other neo-Marxists (Hatcher and Troyna, 1994) for ignoring the important role of the teaching unions in resistance to the state's educational agenda.

It may appear at first that a Marxist approach to policy analysis is more appropriate to understanding a policy that is part of an access movement with its roots in the radical traditions of working class education. However, many of the same criticisms used against the pluralist model also apply to a Marxist approach. It is a top-down, linear model and as such would fail to capture and explain localised complexity. What is needed is a model that allows a nuanced analysis of the teachers' motives and the context in which they operated. The model needs to be able to describe and explain the various responses of the access students to their experiences of an access course and the factors affecting their transitions to higher education and work. As Power (1995) illustrates above, the complexity of different responses cannot be adequately dealt with using a state centred model. Only very crudely and abstractly could problems of the state in capitalist society be used to understand the policy process in the context of this small, case study. My main interest is in the micro politics of policy making, in particular the impact of policy and policy effects over the longer term. These are often seen as secondary in both Marxist and traditional pluralist approaches to analysing policy making. However, the

Marxist model is not rejected completely. It may be usefully employed to explain at a macro level how policy decisions made by the central state indirectly impinged on the development of this access policy and its fate. Additionally it may be necessary to employ this approach in order to understand some of the structural constraints affecting students' decisions and responses.

Having considered the theoretical and empirical limitations of both traditional pluralist and Marxist models of policy analysis for my purposes in this thesis it is now necessary to consider whether newer approaches may be more fruitful.

### **3.4 Newer approaches to policy and policy analysis.**

In the 1990s divisions between pluralist and Marxist policy analysis became less gladiatorial and more fruitful opening up new avenues for policy sociology. Raab (1994) describes this –

If Marxists are no longer so inclined to read off education policy and political action from the nature of capitalism and the class structures, so pluralists do not read them off from either the configuration of interest group relationships or from the ought-statements of democratic theory, American style. Marxist researchers now find it necessary to handle psychological and human agency variables seriously... reciprocally, research in the non- Marxist tradition may be framed in terms of the institutional or network structures of the state and the biases or inequalities they bring to bear on the policy processes and outcomes.

(Raab, 1994:22)

It could be claimed that this useful coming together of perspectives resulted in the development of a newer more eclectic approach, namely, education policy sociology and in particular policy trajectory studies. Education policy sociology is the term used to signify a renewed interest in education policy making. It is 'rooted in the social science tradition, historically informed and drawing on qualitative and illuminative techniques' (Ozga, 1987). Raab does however question Ozga's formulation suggesting it may be the result of more than one tradition and should not preclude drawing on quantitative techniques (Raab, 1994).



### **3.5 Researching Conservative Education Policy**

Since 1979 the Conservative Government introduced, consistently if not coherently, educational policies aimed at re-structuring education along market lines (DES, 1980, 1986, 1988). This among other things has produced an increased sociological interest in education policy analysis. As a result, new approaches have emerged producing interesting debates which are helpful in highlighting crucial issues and under-explored problems in identifying policy and policy analysis. Such new approaches continue to find fruitful focus in the plethora of education policies introduced since the New Labour victory in 1997.

There have been some ground-breaking and interesting empirical studies of Conservative educational policies studying the experiences and actions of policy makers, teachers and pupils at ground level. Edwards, Fitz, and Whitty (1989) studied the Assisted Places Scheme, Whitty, Edwards and Gewirtz (1993) City Technology Colleges and Halpin, Fitz and Power (1992) Grant Maintained schools. The work of Bowe, Ball with Gold (1992), and Ball (1990, 1994a) is a major contribution to the development of education policy sociology. In the next section these approaches and issues will be considered in more depth, clarifying what I take to be key terms, helpful conceptual frameworks and new, potentially generative concepts.

### **3.6 Policy Trajectory Studies**

Policy trajectory studies are a method of tracing a single policy from its origins, the political and ideological contexts in which it developed, through to its implementation, testing empirically the claims made for it by its advocates and the policy effects. Edwards et al (1989) and Whitty et al (1993) used this approach to carry out an evaluation of the Assisted Places Scheme and later, City Technology Colleges. In their study of the Assisted Places Scheme their aim was to investigate some of the competing claims being made for and against the scheme. Their study was a multi-level, cross sectional approach looking at national statistics on the allocation and take up of assisted places, as well as analysing the scheme's implementation in selected geographical areas and its effects on the local economy of schooling. The thrust of their methodology was to focus down on how individuals were affected by the scheme. This study was a major influence on my interest in studying the HELC as a piece of policy making. I was attracted to it as an

approach because it seemed to successfully combine both the study of detail, especially policy effects and broader political and economic trends and the complex relationship between the two. This I felt was a relevant approach for tracing the HELC as a single access policy from its inception by teachers at NSFC and then through the biographies of one cohort of students in their transitions to higher education and work. This would allow me to test empirically the claims or policy intentions of the teachers for a scheme to provide opportunities for access to higher education through the experiences of one group of students. It also seemed to help to overcome a problem highlighted in a debate amongst policy sociologists, outlined in the next section, over the necessity of linking macro and micro approaches.

### **3.7 The Bigger Picture: Linking the Micro and the Macro**

In the early 1990s some concern was expressed about the focused nature of these single policy studies of the Education Reform Act (ERA) and post-ERA developments. Ozga (1990) claimed that such studies ignored the bigger picture -

there is a need to bring together structural macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies with structural micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perceptions and experiences.  
(Ozga, 1990: 359)

She argued that while such studies such as those undertaken by Edwards et al (1989) Whitty et al (1993) and Halpin et al (1992) have provided rich descriptive accounts of the actions of teachers, students and policy makers they could focus attention away from theorising the role of the state. She described this as dismantling and describing all the parts of the machine but not being able to explain how it works or what it is for: an activity which she described as being 'busy but blind!' (Ozga 1990:361). She claimed that state-centred theory was still useful and capable of explaining complexity, difference and the contradictory nature of demands made on the state, especially if it is tested against individuals' experiences and perceptions.

Grace (1984) made a similar observation to that of Ozga when he drew a distinction between what he called 'policy science' and 'policy scholarship'. He was critical of studies which take a 'policy science' approach because they were preoccupied with descriptive accounts of particular policies, funding and resource issues and the finer

details of implementation. He claimed that such an approach seemed attractive because it appeared value free and objective, providing a detailed concrete account of policy initiatives, directly related to action. What Grace's study does not provide is a consideration of the wider context, or Ozga's 'bigger picture', particularly structural, political and historical constraints. He contrasted this with the approach he favours, policy scholarship, which involves examining the conflicts and contradictions within interest groups, ideologies and politics of policy making as well as the wider structuring and constraining effects of social and economic relations. This distinction has been criticised (Whitty, 1997) as it poses an either/or approach when good policy analysis should involve both the concerns of policy science and policy scholarship. As indicated above Edwards et al's (1989) policy trajectory study of the Assisted Places Scheme does involve the detail of policy production as well as the bigger picture and the interaction of the two. For this and the reasons outlined above I would have adopted a policy trajectory approach as most relevant to my research needs had I not become interested in Bowe, Ball with Gold's (1992) policy cycle approach.

### **3.8 The Policy Cycle**

The policy cycle is not a break with trajectory studies but rather an attempt to develop the approach by adding a new conceptual structure (Ball, 1994a). It was first used by Bowe, Ball with Gold (1992) in order to develop an 'education policy sociology' and to move away from the traditional priorities of policy analysis. These had tended to focus on educational administration and management and were preoccupied with the central role of the government. Ball (1994a) claims that such theories, which he calls a 'managerialist perspective', mistakenly separate the generation and implementation of policy. They regard policy as something that '*gets done*' to people by a chain of implementors whose roles are defined by legislation. In contrast to this, Bowe et al (1992) move the focus away from the central state to the complex ways in which policies are created and re-created in schools by teachers according to their institutional realities or micro politics. Localised complexity replaces central state control in this democratic and pluralist approach. This policy-as-process account focuses on the recontextualisation of policy that takes place in schools and is viewed as a cycle rather than a linear top-down or bottom-up approach. The policy cycle model has three primary policy contexts: the context of



practice, the context of policy text production, and the context of influence. Each of these contexts has different arenas, sites and groups with very different interests at stake. Each context interacts with the other and it is important to note that policy can be initiated in any context. There is no straightforward flow of information between these contexts: they are loosely coupled, and each may involve conflict, contradiction and ad hocery. This they illustrate diagrammatically -

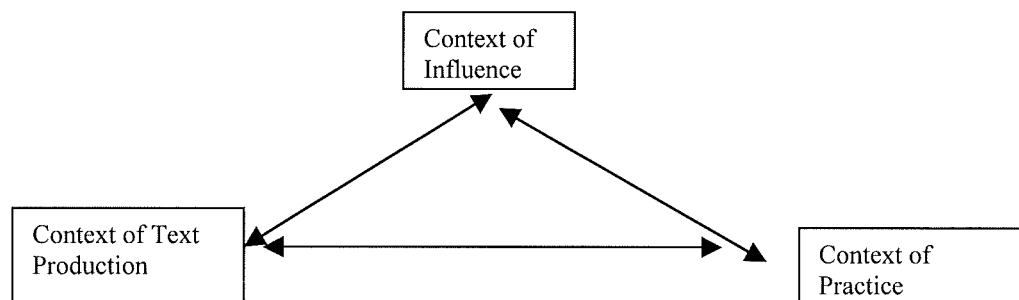


Fig. 1 : Contexts of policy making (Source: Bowe, Ball with Gold, 1992:20)

More recently Ball (1994a) has added two additional contexts to extend the cycle. These are the context of outcomes, which indicates the need to be clear about first order (practice) effects and second order effects, and the context of political strategy. The first context is concerned with analysing issues of justice, equality and individual freedom and the second identifies a set of political and social activities aimed at tackling inequalities. These may have been added in response to criticisms like Hatcher and Troyna's that –

Ball and his colleagues have little to say about the possibility of 'disruptive' strategies in their more active, collective and political forms.  
(1994: 167)

Bowe et al (1992) used the policy cycle model to research how teachers and departments in four secondary comprehensive schools and two LEAs responded to the Education Reform Act 1988, particularly the 'effects' of the National Curriculum and the local management of schools. It is central to the model that the policy is not 'implemented' but 'produced' by teachers in schools -

as a policy the National Curriculum remains both the object and subject of struggles over meaning. It is not so much being implemented in schools as

being 're-created' not so much 'reproduced' as 'produced'. While schools are changing as a result, so too is the National Curriculum. This leaves us with a strong feeling that the state control model is analytically very limited. Our empirical data do not suggest that the State is without power. But equally it indicates such power is strongly circumscribed by the contextual features of institutions, over which the State may find that control is both problematic and contradictory in terms of other political projects.

(Bowe et al, 1992: 120)

Bowe et al (1992) attempt to de-centre the state by drawing on Foucault's conception of power. This is a complex notion of power where the state is regarded as a product of discourse. Teachers are positioned by policies, taking up the positions constructed for them within policies but at the same time having the possibility of re-creating those policies. Policies can therefore be both constraining and productive –

relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play.

(Foucault, 1981 quoted in Ball, 1994a: 20)

The conception of policies as both text and discourses, implicit in each other, is another strand of Ball's (1994a) policy cycle. Texts are regarded not as 'things' but as representations with many histories, readings and interpretations: regarded as the agency side of policy work. The authors of these texts cannot hope to control their meanings as they will be read in different ways and used in relation to the circumstances of the readers. In relation to access education this means that the teachers who developed the policy in their various locations, cannot determine the ways in which access education will be interpreted by the tutors and students in those colleges and universities. In each context of the policy process those involved will make the policy theirs according to their own agendas and micro politics. In this way access students can be viewed not merely passive recipients of policy but active creators of it. It is also possible that the policy cycle involves a two-way flow with policies initiated in the context of practice, like access education, being taken up by or influencing policies initiated in the context of influence. Such a two-way flow of influence is important in my analysis of access policy. It indicates a further limitation for my purposes of pluralist and Marxist top-down, linear models of policy implementation as discussed previously.

In order to distinguish between policies, Bowe et al (1992) draw on Barthes' distinction between readerly and writerly texts. Writerly texts invite the reader to join in, to co-author encouraging a creative reading of the text. Readerly texts on the other hand encourage a closure of meaning and deference to the authority of the text. Access education can be taken as an example of writerly texts, leaving teachers and students room for manoeuvre and interpretation. This was potentially a useful concept to employ in my research as it would enable a focus on the extent to which the HELC could be re-interpreted by teachers and students and how this might change in the different arenas of the study.

Policy as discourse is used by Ball (1994a) to indicate the constraints of policy work. Discourses frame what can be thought and said and by whom. Policies enter existing patterns of inequality and are framed by the dominant discourses of society at any given time. Those involved in the processes of policy making are not completely free agents but are positioned in various ways by such dominant discourses.

Another feature of Ball's (1994a) approach to policy analysis is that it should involve a 'tool box' of diverse theories and concepts, where two theories are probably better than one –

....the complexity and scope of policy analysis – from an interest in the workings of the state to a concern with contexts of practice and the distributional outcomes of policy – precludes the possibility of successful single theory explanations. What we need in policy analysis is a tool box of diverse concepts and theories- an applied sociology rather than a pure one.

(Ball, 1994a: 14)

Ball acknowledges that these different theories frequently sit awkwardly together but he feels this is creative and exciting. In terms of my research this allows an eclectic approach drawing on various theories and concepts. This new approach, has been challenged by Hatcher and Troyna (1994) from a Marxist position, mainly for its attempt to de-centre the power of the central state. Unfortunately the debate between Ball (1990, 1994b) and Hatcher and Troyna (1994) ignores important feminist contributions to debates around theories of the state and education policy analysis (Henry, 1993; Hey, 1996; Kenway and Epstein, 1996) and these will also be considered in the following sections.

### 3.9 Strengths of the Policy Cycle Approach to Policy Work

There are many aspects of the policy cycle model that are seductive and appealing for a teacher-as-researcher like myself. Firstly the notion that policy making can be initiated in any of the contexts in the cycle and can involve a two way process. This offers the possibility of de-centering the central state by considering policies initiated in the context of practice by teachers in schools or colleges like the HELC at NSFC. Power is seen as circulating from the context of practice to the context of influence where successful micro policies, like the 'pockets of activity' (Parry, 1996) which characterised early access education, are decontextualised from their original location and recontextualised into a new assemblage. This approach to access education as policy-as-process will be considered more fully in Chapter Five.

Secondly, Ball's more Foucauldian approach moves away from the over-determinism of a state control model and shifts the focus in the direction of teachers in schools or colleges. This is important as it insists upon the creative role of teachers, and indeed, students, as policy producers and recontextualisers. In this model they make the policy their own according to their own agendas and the micro-politics of their institutions. Some of these policies may be counter-hegemonic.

Thirdly the account attempts to do justice to the complexity of policy production, and tries to capture changes over time introduced by different personnel, constraints and political circumstances. To see policy texts as -

cannibalised products of multiple (but circumscribed) influences and agendas. There is adhocery, negotiation and serendipity within the state, within the policy formulation process.

(Ball, 1994a:16)

This raises interesting questions about the 'ownership' of policies by the individuals concerned: teachers, head teachers or students, who may have vested interests or strong personal commitment to making policies their own. What happens when there are changes of personnel can also be crucial. Such influences require empirical recognition in studying policy on the ground. This relates centrally to my research where the development of the HELC by very committed teachers raises interesting issues in policy making. In particular whether a policy can be deemed to be successful only if it can be sustained by different teachers and in changed circumstances.

Fourthly, Ball's theoretical approach takes better account of varying local

situations in schools and colleges. Ball (1994a) claims teachers in over-subscribed schools have much more room for manoeuvre in their selection of students, levels of funding and working conditions than those in under-subscribed schools in inner cities. The reverse could be said to be true where teachers in inner city schools with working class pupils have much more freedom to manoeuvre because it is assumed there is less at stake. For example many innovative curriculum projects were developed by teachers in inner city schools with working class pupils in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of the ways in which the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) was subverted by Humanities teachers in the 1980s is a good example of this (Whitty and Kirton, 1995).

Ball's policy cycle is also appealing since it represents itself as an open-ended and tentative approach. Ball presents it as a way of exploring a theoretical heuristic and a shift away from what he sees as the closure of Marxist accounts of policy making and analysis. Ball claims that Marxist approaches like those offered as an alternative by Hatcher and Troyna are no longer relevant to an understanding of politics in high modern society as they are too prescribed, fixed and frozen using unhelpful binaries (Ball, 1994b). This exciting approach is an important development in policy sociology and trajectory studies.

### **3.10 Critiques of the Policy Cycle Approach to Policy Work**

The Foucauldian influence in the policy cycle is disliked by some critics as 'a spell that has diverted Ball's attention from possibilities to impossibilities' (White and Crump, 1993) and as the new 'iron cage' of determinism (Whitty, 1997, Ed. D. lecture). These criticisms refer to Ball's use of 'policy as discourse' as the constraint side of policy. Some critics argue that having criticised Marxists for their over-determinism and closure Ball then introduces a new determinism: that of those involved in the policy process being positioned by policy discourses. Henry (1993) is also critical of this Foucauldian influence, for while it may do justice to the complex and contradictory nature of the policy process it could be said to 'describe' rather than 'explain' policies. She claims it can describe the complexity with which educational policy has been produced, recreated and recontextualised in the context of practice, influence and text production but it does not explain why this occurred in the way it did and the repositioning at each shift.

Ball's model has been criticised by Hatcher and Troyna (1994) from a Marxist

position. They are critical of the fact that Ball's model does not have a clear theory of the state which they believe to be crucial for an adequate understanding of education policy and its relationship with economic interests. Ball is attempting to develop a theoretical position of critical pluralism, which attempts to reconcile the crucial role of human agency in shaping state policy while recognising economic constraints of capital accumulation and legitimation. This leads Hatcher and Troyna's to claim that Ball is ambivalent and inconsistent in his approach. They assert that his attempts to correct the over determinism of a statist model of the policy process in favour of conceding relative power to teachers and schools paints an unrealistic picture. They argue that under conditions of quasi education markets in the form of Local Management of Schools (LSM) in particular, the mechanism of per capita formula funding, schools are severely constrained. Bowe et al (1992) find little evidence that schools can creatively reinterpret LMS. Therefore Hatcher and Troyna claim that Bowe et al's empirical findings do not support their theoretical model.

Hatcher and Troynner also claim that the use of Barthes' distinction between readerly and writerly texts obscures more than it illuminates. Very few of the policies made by the Conservative governments of 1979-1994 were writerly according to Hatcher and Troyna. Contradictory occurrences have changed and continue to change the relationship between the state and civil society. What has occurred is the rolling back of the state through the introduction of quasi markets but at the same time increased central state control over the curriculum and surveillance of teachers and schools through the publication of league tables and the use of Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspections. Whitty, Power and Halpin (1998) outline a new modality of state control. Their international study of devolution and choice in five countries suggests –

Despite the rhetoric about 'rolling back' or 'hollowing out' the state, certain aspects of state intervention have been maintained - indeed strengthened. The strong evaluative, state is a minimalist one in many respects, but a more powerful and authoritarian one in others. In Britain it is not just that policies of de-regulation that have allowed the Government to abdicate some of its responsibilities for ensuring social justice, but in increasing a limited number of state powers (most noticeably through the National Curriculum and its associated system of testing) it has actually strengthened its capacity to foster particular interests while appearing to stand outside the frame.

(Whitty et al, 1998: 46)

Hatcher and Troyna appear to be operating with an out of date concept of the state and even Ball's attempt to de-centre the state in his model may not do justice to the complex and contradictory forces at work.

Ball (1994b) defends himself against Hatcher and Troyna by agreeing that his work is contradictory but he sees this as a strength as he is attempting to explore new possibilities and bring together disparate theories. He accepts that in trying to resolve the state /agency problem he has given the impression that teachers have more freedom than they do but he has done this out of an unhappiness with the disempowering and totalitarian vision of the state offered by Marxists.

Neo-Marxist, Miriam Henry (1993), like Hatcher and Troyna, is critical of Ball's work for paying insufficient attention to the role of the state and its relationship with capital. In his more recent work (Ball,1993) she observes his analysis of the state has shrunk to merely an aspect of a policy context rather than having a more central role in the workings of policy. She also claims that-

his toolbox yields impressive returns at the descriptive level - for example, in fleshing out the nuances of policy process - while remaining disappointingly skimpy at a more explanatory level.

(Henry, 1993: 102)

What is missing, she suggests, in Ball's preoccupation with localised complexity is good structural analysis. Education policy making would benefit from more engagement with neo-Marxist and feminist attempts to theorise the ways in which ethnicity, gender and social class inter-relate in relation to education policy making, she asserts. His emphasis on micropolitics while usefully focusing on the agency side of policy work and localised complexity needs to be problematised neglecting as it does the 'bigger picture' (Ozga, 1992) and structural influences.

There is also a problem with the policy cycle in the way in which the contexts of policy production and practice are drawn in the diagram (see figure 1). These are misleading as they give the impression of each context being discrete. For example, why

have a separate context of text production when texts can be produced in each context? Gale (1999) suggests that to make this diagrammatic representation more accurate and useful in breaking the rigidity of policy production which is part of Bowe et al's project –

..if these contexts were reconceived (not necessarily redrawn ) as different descriptions of the same social reality – as textual elements discursively selected and ordered to differently construct them – they would be more clearly be seen as embedded in each other. Given such reconception, Bowe, Ball and Gold's contexts of policy making might resemble the more fluid relations implied in Ball's (1994a p.26) later additions of the context of outcomes and the context of political strategy.

(Gale, 1999: 404)

If it was Ball's intention that these contexts should not be conceptually distinct it is not clear in his explanations of them.

Despite these criticisms the policy cycle approach is still useful for my purposes. It is flexible enough as a framework to incorporate solutions to some of the valid points made. Its strengths are that it is eclectic and as Ball explains, it is intended to be a heuristic device. The ways in which it can be adapted for use in this thesis will be explained in the concluding section of this chapter and its usefulness evaluated in the concluding chapter.

### **3.11 Feminist Approaches to Policy and Policy Analysis**

It is also necessary to consider feminist critiques of approaches to policy analysis. These also throw light on shortcomings, though not insurmountable, in the policy cycle approach. Much of the recent policy research from both post-structuralist and Marxist perspectives comes under attack from feminists for marginalising gender and ethnicity and failing to draw on feminist perspectives. Such omissions need to be rectified in any approach adopted for my research. The cohort to be studied were heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, gender and social class. Investigating the influence of such factors on their responses to the HELC and their experiences of higher education and employment was crucial. The HELC itself was intended to contribute to the provision of equal opportunities as it attempted to counter former educational and social disadvantage. Therefore equity issues were central to my research and I considered feminist



perspectives a potentially rich source of relevant concepts and approaches. So it is to the exact nature of such omissions that I will now turn.

In a review essay, David (1996) critiques some key policy texts. These include the work of Fitz et al (1993), Edwards et al (1989) and Whitty et al (1993). She argues that despite their carefully sustained and detailed studies of policies resulting from Conservative government legislation they have ignored the potential gendered effects of such policies. She also reviews the work of Gewitz, Ball and Bowe (1995) on parental choice in the educational market place. David critiques this study for its poorly defined use of 'equity' which is seen mainly in terms of social class analysis, ignoring gender relations with the 'occasional genuflection to race and/or ethnicity' (p.420). She regrets the little reference made to the 'now voluminous literature on feminist analysis of education, anti-sexist and anti-racist approaches'. She makes reference to her feminist work with others on parental choice by concluding –

The fact that it is women and mothers especially who are implicated by public policy discourses on choice and markets seems to have escaped the gaze of not only right wing politicians but also social science researchers, especially men even on the left.

(David, 1996:421)

Kenway and Epstein (1996) outline the main focus of feminist research in the first world as the effects of educational policies on women's work as teachers, administrators, governors and mothers. They call for more work on the effects of marketisation on students in relation to assessment, curriculum and pedagogy. In this analysis they claim that conceptualisations of the nation and the state need to be treated as problematic, especially shifts in the nature of the state. Most studies, they suggest, also downplay the forces of globalisation, regionalisation and localisation as well as the increasing role of technology in educational change: in other words further elements of Ozga's 'bigger picture'. While it is useful to draw on the rich tradition of feminist research to provide better evidence of the gendered, racialised and classed nature of policy effects other feminists call for a much more holistic, feminist analytical approach to policy sociology.

In the debate between Ball and Hatcher and Troyna (1994), Ball admits that

while their theories of the role of the state are complex and sophisticated the same cannot be said of their theories of the non-state or civil society. Yet any adequate policy analysis of recent changes in education and particularly marketisation needs to concern itself with the changing relationship between the state and civil society. Hey (1996) attributes this theory underdevelopment specifically, in Ball's work, to the failure of radical left academics to draw on important feminist work in the sociology of education-

Feminist analysis has always sought to problematise the liberal conceptualisation of the split between the public and the private presumed in the State/ civil society couplet.....Feminisms are under no illusions about the political nature of civil society. We have a robust set of concepts about the power dynamics of civil society's formal and informal institutions....

(Hey, 1996: 353)

In some ways feminist educational research has provided a better understanding of the relationship between the state and civil society. This is outlined in detail by Arnot (1992); particularly relevant is the way in which schooling is analysed as standing between public and private spheres mediating as it does between the workplace and the family. The introduction of quasi markets in education has changed the nature of this relationship. The effects of these changes not only on social class inequalities but also those of gender and 'race' need to be investigated. Arnot (1992) outlines the ways in which feminist perspectives have been marginalised in analyses of Conservative educational reforms. She suggests this misses the opportunity to understand how the contradictory ideologies of increased market choice on the one hand and support for the patriarchal family on the other, have impacted on women's lives. Feminist perspectives should centrally inform both the methodology and the whole approach of policy analysis rejecting the old masculinist categories and values. As Ozga (2000) states –

Because 'normal' enquiry has been so exclusively masculine in its assumptions, it follows that women are largely absent or spoken for in gender-blind theory and literature. In methodological terms, then, one of the key aims of feminist research was/is to collect and disseminate women's voices and thus to challenge their exclusion. Going further, feminist theorists and researchers argued that 'adding on' women to existing bodies of knowledge was not sufficient: that what were needed were feminist epistemologies and ontologies; in other words, ways which we perceive the world and know the world that were distinctively feminist.

(Ozga, 2000:84)

This is in keeping with Henry's (1993) advice to Ball to strengthen his approach by 'some engagement with neo-Marxist and feminist attempts to theorise the complex interweavings of ethnicity / race, class and gender in relation to education policy making' and for his theoretical eclecticism 'to synthesise the best of modernist-structural and postmodernist/poststructuralist analyses' (p. 104).

A useful new approach by Fraser (1997) goes some way to providing such a synthesis through her framework for analysing different forms of exploitation and oppression. She outlines how the new political context has seen a shift in ways in which social justice is imagined from the politics of redistribution to the politics of recognition: the former dealing with the economic injustices and the latter with the cultural injustices, under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, 'race', gender and sexuality. Fraser provides a method of reconciling what is frequently seen as an either/or choice by providing a sophisticated understanding of how oppressions and exploitations work together to produce injustices and need to be remedied as such. However, she points out that it is useful to separate them for analytical purposes. She uses the example of the working class who require redistribution and the abolition of class inequalities rather than cultural recognition. She compares this to what she calls despised sexualities, gays and lesbians who exist throughout the class structure and may suffer from exploitation but their main demand, though she recognises diversity here, requires a change in the cultural valuation of their sexuality or recognition. People who are subjected to both cultural and economic injustice face a recognition-redistribution dilemma, in having to both deny and claim their specificity. Fraser places 'race' and gender in this category. As remedies to these dilemmas she considers the strategies of affirmation or transformation but makes an appeal for socialism which she sees as transformation combined with reconstruction. This, she claims, would require political coalitions to be formed to counter the fragmentation of identity politics.

Fraser's approach has been usefully employed in a policy analysis by Power and Gewirtz (1999) to consider New Labour policy on tackling multiple disadvantage through Education Action Zones. Drawing on Fraser's framework of economic and cultural injustices and affirmative and transformative remedies they interrogate the understandings of social justice which underlie the Education Action Zones policy. While

they claim the use of the term 'social inclusion' indicates a more sophisticated understanding of social justice than in preceding policies, such policies recognise economic injustices at the expense of cultural injustices. Power and Gewirtz show that while Education Action Zones address economic injustice through some redistribution, the increased funds are unlikely to be sufficient to do so. The cultural remedies proposed could actually contribute to, rather than address, such injustices by pathologising the communities they seek to help.

Fraser's work (1997) is an important development in providing a comprehensive method of clarifying often contradictory demands for social justice as well as recognition-redistribution dilemmas which under-lie much policy work. As such it is extremely relevant to understanding the dilemmas facing the teachers and students in this study. Access education involved targeting disadvantaged students for extra resources involving them in a recognition-redistribution dilemma. It also takes account of the different oppressions and exploitations experienced by students on this course without privileging any of them. Used alongside a policy cycle approach it provides a mechanism for explaining why things happen as they do rather than mere description of events. In these ways it helps to overcome some of the criticisms outlined above.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

Having provided an overview of the different approaches to policy analysis it is now possible to consider the key terms, helpful conceptual frameworks and new, potentially generative concepts that can be used to research the HELC as a piece of policy making. My research was originally influenced in design by the policy trajectory study of the assisted places scheme (Edwards et al, 1989). This provides a straightforward model for tracing a policy from its origins, its implementation, the changes that were made to it and testing empirically the claims made by its advocates. Bowe et al (1994) have made a useful attempt to develop trajectory studies by introducing the idea of a continuous policy cycle in which policies are recontextualised by the participants, at every stage or context in the policy process. The fate of access education, of which the HELC was part, cannot be properly understood using top-down linear models of the policy process. It can be more fruitfully explored through a complex and cyclical analysis of policy that allows explanatory power to be re-interpreted at the local level. The possibility of a two-way

flow in the policy cycle allows ideas to move from the context of practice to the context of influence, traditionally regarded as the source of policy production, is also appealing. To extend the application of the policy cycle approach to both further education and higher education through a focus on access education is important as the approach has been used mainly to research the secondary sector of education.

The contexts in the policy cycle provide a useful method for organising my chapters as well as linking the macro and micro levels of the policy process. I am particularly sympathetic to Ball's attempt to move power in the model in favour of teachers and schools. The emphasis on agency and the possibilities for teachers, tutors and students to 'make the policy their own' is a focus of this thesis. However, I am more wary of the use of the concept of discourse as the only 'constraint' aspect of policies. Ball's emphasis changes and in some of his work he does take account of structural factors when he states that policies enter existing patterns of inequality (Ball, 1994a:17). Responding to Henry's (1993) criticism it may be necessary to give rather more attention to structural factors affecting the policy cycle than was allowed in the initial formulation. Account will also be taken of the critiques of policy sociology by feminist sociologists who have indicated not only the importance of studying the gendered, racialised and social classed nature of policy effects but also moving away from the whole masculinist stance of earlier approaches.

An understanding of equity issues in the context of what Fraser (1997) has called the 'postsocialist' condition is also crucial. She provides a clear conceptual framework for interrogating key equity concepts, such as social justice, recognition and redistribution that apply centrally to access education, as it involves, targeting those groups under-represented in higher education. My approach, therefore encouraged by Ball's call for a toolbox of diverse theories and concepts, is eclectic and is influenced by structural, post-structuralist and feminist approaches to policy. An attempt to operationalise the policy cycle to research the policy process of one example of access education will also provide the opportunity to evaluate it. The following chapter describes how the qualitative methods necessary for a policy cycle approach were employed to research this case study of a small, access policy initiative.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter Three reviewed the possible approaches to policy analysis and provided a rationale for why I opted in favour of a policy cycle approach. This chapter considers some of the methodological implications of choosing the approach and how this informed my study. The chapter begins with an introduction of the research context and my role within it. Defining the 'case' in this case study as well as a discussion of whether the study is ethnographic is undertaken. How the fieldwork was organised and the methods of data collection and analysis used is outlined. Finally the dilemmas of moving from teacher to researcher and researching one's own institution are discussed.

#### **4.2 Locating myself in the research process**

Between 1985 and 1991 I was employed as a Social Science and Humanities teacher at NSFC. In September 1991 a secondment to a higher education institution to teach on a secondary Post Graduate Certificate of Education Course involved leaving the group of HELC students who were my tutor group half way through their A levels. This tutor group became the subjects of this research sharing the characteristics of being the third cohort of the HELC. They were chosen rather than one of the other cohorts for very pragmatic and practical reasons. As I refer to my tutor by their pseudonyms throughout this chapter I need to reintroduce the characters here. There were seven young women – Ade, Denise, Eleni, Kit, Lisa, Lola and Zelda and five young men – Danny Max, Mark, Seth and Tim in the cohort. I remained in touch with all these students throughout the research period except for Danny who refused to be part of the study after the first interview in 1992. They were my tutor group from 1990–1991 and I had developed a positive teacher / student relationship with them. I felt this was a good basis on which to conduct research to provide insights into the workings of a policy designed to provide opportunities for access to higher education. It had been established by Humanities teachers, motivated by social justice concerns, who were keen to protect the interests of mainly working class students who wished to take A level courses. As a member of the

department responsible for designing a policy to meet such needs, I could provide important 'insider' insights and information about both the College and the course. Researching one's own institution and students is not unproblematic but this will be discussed more fully at the end of this chapter. I perceived my position in the College and department as well as my relationship with this cohort as a good research opportunity with rich theoretical yield.

### **4.3 The Influence of Education Policy Sociology**

Researching the effectiveness of access education through the complex and interesting educational and social biographies of these students fitted in well with my prior interest in policy sociology. I felt this would make an important contribution to the growing body of knowledge known as education policy sociology. As illustrated in Chapter Two, access education is a relatively under-researched and under-theorised area of education policy. Researching younger, alternative applicants' experiences of an access course and higher education with a focus on the policy process would add new knowledge to this area of sociology. I was also interested to test the effectiveness of the scheme my colleagues and I had set up and to consider any unintended consequences. It was for these reasons that I gained the consent of my tutees and that of the college to conduct the research. This initial research focus has developed and changed with the collection of data and through reading, reflection and discussion with colleagues. What evolved was a greater interest in the policy cycle as a conceptual framework and in particular the relationship between policy intentions and policy effects. As detailed in Chapter Three this approach was favoured over other approaches to policy analysis because it allows policy making to be seen as a cyclical process. It provides two main contexts, implicit in each other, in which policies texts can be initiated. In this way it can be applied to small, local policies developed by teachers rather than a focus on the activities of Governments. It offers a creative role to both students and teachers implicated in the policy process.

### **4.4 A Policy Cycle Approach: A Methodological Choice**

Adopting a policy cycle approach to policy analysis is not just a theoretical choice. It also has implications for the sort of methods employed and in that sense it is also a methodological choice. My focus is the various ways in which the HELC as an access

policy was made and re-made by the teachers and students involved. I wanted to study the relationship between the policy intentions of the teachers and the policy effects through the educational biographies and careers of one cohort of students over a longer time period than is usual in policy analysis. By necessity charting this policy process insists on the use of different qualitative research tools for different contexts.

A policy cycle approach also marks a change that has taken place in the emphasis on research methodologies in policy analysis by policy researchers. Until recently there has been very little debate about these in policy analysis. As Taylor states –

It would appear that methodological questions about what ‘data’ are needed for analysis and how that material is collected have been less important in critical policy work than the theoretical frameworks which are used and the questions which are asked.

(Taylor, 1997: 23)

Commentary and critique have dominated policy analysis rather than discussions of approaches to empirical research and have therefore failed to capture what Ball (1990:9) calls ‘the messy realities of influence, pressure, dogma, expediency, conflict, compromise, intransigence, resistance, error, opposition and pragmatism in the policy process’. When empirical work is undertaken Maguire and Ball (1994) claim, it tends to be methodologically unsophisticated, realist and representational with issues of value and meaning taken for granted. They point out however that when methodological commentaries are published they tell a more doubtful and complex picture (see Ball, 1993 quoting Deem and Brehony, 1994; Gewirtz and Ozga, 1993; and Walford, 1991).

Taylor (1997:24) applauds recent work offering new and exciting methods for policy analysis (Ball, 1990) and the shift to empirical work focusing on ‘effects’ rather than policy intentions. Questions of subjectivity, interpretation and the standpoint of the researcher are now central, Taylor (1997) claims. She attributes these shifts to the influence of post-modernist and feminist approaches to research. One of the attractions of Ball’s policy cycle approach is its eclectic use of different theories and their associated methodologies. This is what he calls a ‘toolbox’ approach though he admits that this results in the charge of inconsistency (1994b :4). This approach also makes it possible to employ some ideas about structure or the ‘real’ as well as making use of post-structuralism and feminisms. Debates about what post-modern and feminist approaches to



research have to offer in post-postivist times involve a huge literature, too extensive to summarise here. What I have found useful in such debates (Gill, 1995; Harding, 1993; Hill Collins, 1991; hooks, 1982; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1989) is the call for more reflexivity and critique in the research process. This involves a constant awareness of the influence of one's own political standpoint, how power operates in the research process and an understanding that all knowledge produced is partial and situated.

Having decided upon a policy cycle approach and discussed some of the methodological implications of using this approach two further issues need to be clarified. Firstly to address the issue of whether this research can be called ethnographic. Secondly to decide whether the 'case' in this case study is the students or the policy.

#### **4.5 Is the Study Ethnographic?**

Using a more ethnographic approach was also consistent with my interest in policy sociology. For example Ball recommends ethnography as a tool of policy analysis because as he says –

ethnography is a way of engaging critically with and developing interpretations of, 'the real'. Like genealogy it is disruptive, it is often about giving voice to the unheard.

(Ball, 1994b: 4)

An ethnographic approach was also appropriate to secure a rich description of the social worlds of the HELC students. An aim was to provide them with the opportunity to speak for themselves, to have a 'voice'. The voices of students is one of the absences of much of the research on higher education. My review of research on access education in Chapter Two indicates a lack of in-depth qualitative research on a range of access students' experiences. My initial intention was that the research would be ethnographic. Arriving at a working definition of ethnography is not easy as the ways in which it is defined and used vary a great deal.

The term ethnography is used variously, as an epistemology, a theory of the research process and merely as a research method among others to be used when appropriate. Neither is it used exclusively by qualitative researchers (see Yin, 1989; Hammersley, 1992). Atkinson and Hammersley also recognise that defining ethnography is controversial. They claim that the term usually refers to forms of social research having a substantial number of the following features –

1. A strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them.
2. A tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured data' that is data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories.
3. Investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail.
4. Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most.

(Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994: 248)

Using this set of criteria my research qualifies as ethnographic. These criteria, however, omit the central issue and that is the need to observe what people do, rather than rely on what they say they do, realities being lived as well as spoken. It is crucial to observe social processes in addition to a dependence on narratives though both observation and interview data are 'representations' open to the interpretation of the researcher.

I then considered a more purist account of ethnography employed by Skeggs (1994) which she calls 'feminist cultural studies ethnography'. Through a process of reflexivity about her research she came to realise that ethnography is not a 'method' rather it is a theory of the research process. It involves certain theoretical assumptions about the nature of reality and interpretation. The characteristics she cites entail -

- Some account of context
- Fieldwork that will be conducted over a prolonged period of time.
- Being conducted within the settings of the participants.
- Involving the researcher in participation and observation.
- Involving an account of the development of the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

(Skeggs, 1994: 76)

What was difficult for me as a researcher was to meet the requirement that ethnography requires - 'participation and observation conducted within the settings of the participants' and 'over a prolonged period of time'. Prior to starting the research I did have a year of teaching and tutoring the students in this cohort. I was also involved in the processes of setting up the HELC with other teachers. This was an excellent knowledge base on which to build my research. However, it was not technically possible for me to subsequently carry out long periods of participation and observation in the three sites of my study, the college, higher education and workplaces. For this reason the term 'qualitative' rather than ethnographic case study more accurately describes the research.

#### **4.6 Defining the 'Case'**

Robert K. Yin defines case studies as –

A case study is an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

(Yin, 1989: 23)

The HELC was a contemporary phenomenon studied within its real life context at NSFC and subsequently in the experiences of the students in the sites of further and higher education and workplaces. As a policy it was 'made and re-made' by the students and staff according to institutional and individual possibilities and constraints at particular times. The policy became 'a cannibalized product of multiple (but circumscribed) influences and agendas' (Ball, 1994a:16). In that sense the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context were not clearly evident. Multiple sources of evidence are used; documents about the course, college and the students; interview data from students, some of their parents and teachers. Data were also collected through group interviews.

Stake claims 'a case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied' (1994:236). I decided that the 'case' was to be the HELC as a policy rather than using the students as a number of 'cases'. This was influenced by the successful way in which a policy has been used in trajectory studies (Edwards et al, 1989) as the thread which runs through the research allowing a tracing of the making and re-making of the

policy through the lived experiences and social identities of the recipients. As Stake claims-

The utility of case study research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience. The methods of qualitative case study are largely the methods of disciplining personal and particularized experience.

(Stake, 1994:245)

Deem and Brehony (1994) used a small number of governing bodies from two LEAs in their study. They ask whether the use of case studies can offer anything of value to those interested in critically appraising educational reform? The problem they outline is that case studies may merely yield idiosyncratic data that is then easily dismissed as unrepresentative. However Deem and Brehony generated data on governing bodies which proved to be fascinating, extensive and controversial (Deem and Brehony, 1994:155).

It is the choice of the 'case' that is the key. Single 'cases' are the stuff of much qualitative research and can be very vivid and illuminating especially if they are chosen to be "critical", extreme, unique or revelatory (Yin, 1984). Quoting Firestone, Miles and Huberman (1993) claim that the aim of qualitative research is to make analytic generalisations not 'sample-to-population' generalisations. I sought to optimise the understanding of the production and effects of a policy through the experiences of the students and teachers rather than making generalisations beyond it. As Stake puts it –

The purpose of case study is not to represent the world but to represent the case.

(Stake, 1994: 245)

In this way I hoped to provide an informed and interesting case study of one small policy initiative.

#### **4.7 Organising the Field Work**

My choice of a policy cycle approach meant a commitment to qualitative methods as a means of tracking the shifts in students' views, the complexities and contradictions of their experiences, as well as accessing the voices of authority and influence. The

introduction to this thesis provided an outline of why this research was undertaken and the research aims but it is useful to revisit them here.

Four aims guided my research –

- To examine the development of a small policy initiative particularly the social processes involved in its production and its subsequent fate.
- To adapt and develop a policy cycle approach to trace the historical and ideological development of access education nationally from the early 1970s to the late 1990s.
- To explore the relationship between policy intentions and policy effects: in particular how one group of students and teachers involved 'made' and 're-made' the policy in each context of the policy cycle according to their own agendas and biographies.
- To consider the implications of this research for contemporary developments in access education and policy sociology

#### **4.8 Using Documentary Sources**

In order to meet these aims I employed different research tools for different contexts. This involved using secondary sources for some aspects of the research. In order to trace the ideological and historical development of access education I used some of the key texts and commentaries on these texts. I made a conscious decision to view such texts as policy rather than to interview the key players in the context of influence. My main focus was the voices of the students as policy producers.

Some of the key texts included accounts of government legislation and reports, evaluations, journal articles, some of which were over thirty years old, and consequently attempting to discover the motives of the authors and their audiences was quite difficult. To understand local text production, I analysed key texts about HELC. These were leaflets about the course, details in prospectuses, and local newspaper articles as well as relevant statistics about the local borough. For the context of practice, documents, for example, reports to parents, self-assessments and UCCA and PCAS applications to higher education as well as the tutor's insider knowledge were used to construct a social and educational biography of each student.

#### 4.9 Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the twelve students in the cohort under study between April and July 1992. This was their second year of A level study. The focus of these interviews was fourfold. Firstly, to enable students to discuss retrospectively their time at secondary school. Secondly, to explore their feelings about being on the HELC and at NSFC and to explore their imagined futures and to gather information about their family background (see appendix 1). The questions had been piloted with students in the fourth cohort of the course and amended accordingly. Subsequently I piloted the questions with other groups of students. These interviews which were taped took place at the college.

Each subsequent interview gave me the opportunity to check details and to ask for clarification where necessary; what Glaser and Strauss (1967) call 'filling in the gaps'. The second round of interviews took place between 1994 and 1995 with students in further or higher education or work (see appendix 2). These focussed on their experiences, their lives in general and their progress and reflections about the past and their futures. The third set of interviews were held between 1997 and 1999 (see appendix 3), about their final location in the labour market, about the process of finding employment about their salaries, about their lives in general and their reflections on their educational choices and careers, especially the HELC. These interviews took place either at the college, or in the home of the student or in my home: the choice of location was theirs. Interviews lasted approximately one to two hours each.

Semi-structured, in-depth, taped interviews were also conducted with eight parents (see appendix 4). At the end of the first interview I asked students if they thought their parents would allow me to interview them. I wanted to discover their parents' attitudes to the HELC and NSFC and to see whether their explanations of the factors that led to their under-achievement at secondary differed from those of their children. Kit's parents and Max's parents were abroad. Ade and Danny asked me not to contact their mothers. It was unsurprising that of the eight students whose parents were available all the students elected for their mothers to be interviewed. Students indicated in their interviews that their mothers had played a much more important role in their educational stories than their fathers. There exists a body of sociological knowledge that recognises and researches this phenomenon. As many of those analysing and explaining women's

lives have pointed out, it is principally mothers who hold responsibility for ensuring that the educational needs of their children are met (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay and Standing, 1997; Graham, 1993; Ribbens, 1994).

Semi-structured, in-depth, taped interviews were also conducted (see appendix 6) with two teachers who were tutors on the HELC, two teachers who were active in setting up the course and two careers advisers, one who had been a key player in developing the policy and the other who had worked with this cohort through their two years of A level. One of the career advisors was responsible for advising them about and preparing them for progression routes to higher and further education. Informal discussions with these teachers and tutors about the course and the students also occurred throughout the research period and were recorded as field notes.

Finally very informal group interviews were conducted with the cohort at regular intervals throughout the study. This involved the students meeting up socially on an annual basis to discuss their educational progress, their lives in general and their problems. This was a method of keeping in touch with students in between the individual interviews and a way of plotting their progress. Only the final group interview was audio taped (see appendix 5): details of the others were kept as field notes.

#### **4.10 Data Analysis**

The procedures of data collection, transcription and theory development employed were influenced by the method of investigation known as grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). At first I had some problems with this approach because it seemed to deny the existence of a priori knowledge. However later work by Strauss and Corbin (1990,1994) recognises the usefulness of engagement with relevant theory in order to become theoretically sensitive. What is required, they state, is phenomenological 'bracketing' of such theoretical knowledge while carrying out the analysis of data. As Lather (1991) describes –

Building empirically grounded theory requires a reciprocal relationship between data and theory. Data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a priori theoretical frameworks, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured. The search is for theory which grows out of context-embedded data, not in a way that rejects a priori theory but in a way that keeps preconceptions from distorting the logic of evidence.

This I felt was consistent with the choice of a policy cycle approach which required me to listen to my data in order to discover the ways in which, if any, students, teachers as policy makers could re-write the text. Grounded theory, drawing on symbolic interactionism, emphasises qualitative methods used to produce rich data using the participants' own words and experiences and this is also consistent with a policy cycle approach.

#### **4.11 Transcribing the tapes**

The interviews were transcribed in full and analysed after each round of interviews. These transcripts after being read and re-read were photocopied and cut up into segments according to key concepts and then grouped together. The data was then worked up into categories, using constant comparison by looking for similarities and differences and asking questions of the data. This process made it possible to say something analytically about this case study and in particular about the ways in which the HELC course as a policy was 'produced'. Out of such analyses I was able to develop some theoretical claims about the extent to which a re-writing of access education at a micro level by the students in the cohort was possible and the extent to which it was constrained. Using key texts of the national historical development I was able to chart how access education was made at a local level and then moved to centre stage to be 're-made' according to different social, economic and political circumstances.

#### **4.12 A Longitudinal Study**

This research was undertaken from 1992 until 1999 when the last student subject finished his degree. The advantages and disadvantages of longitudinal studies are outlined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000). Such studies are useful because they allow the charting of growth and development of individuals over an extended period of time. They also enable change to be analysed at the micro level. One of the strengths of this longitudinal approach was to plot policy effects over a longer time span. Much policy analysis focuses on the formulation of policy rather than the longer-term effects. A policy cycle approach does not separate formulation and implementation and emphasises policy outcomes. In the case of access education, tracking such outcomes beyond the course



itself and into higher education and then into employment is fruitful. A more realistic assessment of the impact of the policy on the lives of the participants can then be attempted.

Longitudinal studies also have a number of weaknesses. Repeated interviewing of the same cohort can influence their behaviour. Much of the data are analysed and viewed retrospectively which could lead to distortion. There can also be a problem of sample mortality as repeated contact is required over time. This did not occur with this cohort on a large scale. Of the original twelve students only Danny refused to be part of the research after the initial interview. The reasons for his refusal to participate are unclear. He was however the strongest critic of the course and felt it to be stigmatising (see data in Chapter Seven). The other students kept me informed of Danny's progress, but they were not surprised by his refusal to co-operate, regarding it as 'typical of Danny!' Danny's non-participation is regrettable, as his observations were insightful and perceptive. This is however an example of the 'messy realities' of research indicated by Ball (1990).

#### **4.13 Teacher to Researcher: the Other Side of the Desk**

No outside researcher can ever be as knowledgeable about a practice as a team of insiders.

(Elverno, J. et al, 1997:19)

There is the difficulty of focusing on the familiar – participants (and maybe researchers to) being so close to the situation that they neglect certain, often tacit aspects of it. The task therefore, is to make the familiar strange.

(Cohen et al, 2000:157)

There is an interesting set of methodological issues raised when teachers like myself conduct research with groups that they have taught or tutored. In a sense I had moved on by the time I actually started the research but I drew considerably on my knowledge as their teacher and tutor. There is considerable literature on 'teacher-as-researcher' especially in the action research paradigm (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1992; Somekh, 1995; Winter, 1996) but little on the dilemmas that teachers face (Pollard, 1985) when actually researching students they have taught. The 'teacher-to-researcher' role is faced with both considerable advantages and problems. I would like to explore these briefly.

Firstly, as the quote above from Elverno et al (1997) indicates, being an insider in an institution, with a group of students who you know well makes you very knowledgeable. You know the intimate workings of the place, its secrets, its micro politics and history. You know your students really well, and they know you, from having interacted with them in class over a period of a year. I taught some of these students A level sociology including lessons on the dilemmas of conducting research! As their tutor I listened to their personal problems and advised them about these. I advised them about their studies, discussed their academic progress with their parents at parents' evenings and read their files with details of their previous social and educational histories. Mac an Ghaill (1991) who has also conducted research with students he taught focuses on the positive aspects of the teacher as researcher role -

Just as the art of teaching is regarded by experienced teachers 'as caught rather than taught', so the success of this craft depends upon the researcher's ability to establish relationships with the subjects of his or her study. The establishing and maintaining of these relationships will largely determine the quality of the data collected.

(Mac an Ghaill, 1991: 109)

Mac an Ghaill (1991) describes how the students in his sample regarded him as 'on their side' and this undoubtedly gave him access to quality data. He lived near the school and was involved in anti-racist political activities and as a result students trusted him and co-operated with the research. While the role of 'trusted adult' is undoubtedly important I feel the 'teacher-to-researcher' role is rather more complex and requires further deconstruction. My insider knowledge was extremely useful, my positive relationship with students meant that the interviews were relaxed and informal and that they told me things about their lives that they may not have trusted to a researcher whom they did not know. However, they might have told an outsider researcher things that they would not tell me. My access to the college and this cohort was unproblematic because I was a teacher known to them. It is possible that the students continued to position me as 'teacher-doing-research' throughout the research process. Part of this role was to be positioned as a useful ally, confidante and adviser, and writer of references but always within the parameters of the teacher role. The fact that all but one of the students endured the research project over seven years indicates that being perceived in the dual role of

teacher-doing-research worked to my advantage. It made the research relationship more enduring.

Mac an Ghaill (1991) has a similar perception, that his role as a teacher/researcher was one that could be credibly accommodated in the group of students being studied. However both feminist and post-modern critiques of mainstream sociological research require much more reflexivity about power in the research process and the problems of objectivity and subjectivity. It would be easy to list my feminist and socialist experience and claims to special knowledge that can challenge oppression and to be honest about my power as a white, middle class teacher and leave it at that. But all this requires much more deconstruction. My teacher role involved much more than being seen as 'on their side' and at post-16 level involved considerable power over students. I had the power to decide grades, write UCCA and PCAS references with predicted grades thereby influencing whether students were offered places or not in higher education, to write reports, and report to parents on attendance, punctuality and academic progress and to make comments on assessed work. This power and authority may have made it difficult for students to refuse to be part of the research. I was also one of the initiators of the HELC. This may have influenced the data from students who knew that I had helped to set up the course and that it was important to me. Perhaps they gave me the answers they thought I wanted and played down their criticisms. My political commitment to the course, to their empowerment through the opportunity to go onto higher education may have led me to, as Skeggs describes –

map my frameworks directly onto their experiences without listening to or hearing what they were saying.

(1997: 31)

Though the methods of grounded theory described above made me aware of this pitfall and to try to avoid it.

Another problem of teacher-as-researcher relates to the second quote from Cohen et al (2000) at the top of this section. As a teacher with a great deal of insider information I needed to de-centre from the students, the other teachers and the college, in order to render the familiar strange. This was necessary to make tacit knowledge understandable to those reading the research. As a 'believer' in access education I also found it difficult in analysing the data collected, being careful not to judge the students as

their teacher and to impose educational definitions of success or failure onto their actions. Using a policy cycle approach required that their actions were regarded not as success or failure but simply writing from another script.

Finally I tried to protect the interests of students by conforming to traditional ethical guidelines in sociological research. I gained informed consent, by explaining the aims of the research to students, their parents and teachers honestly and carefully. In order to protect their right to privacy I protected their identities by the use of pseudonyms.

#### **4.14 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined how the methods required by a policy cycle approach to policy analysis were employed to research a case study of a small access education policy. The subjects of the research are introduced and the way the fieldwork was organised is covered. Key methodological issues are discussed including the dilemmas of moving from teacher to researcher as well as researching one's own institution. Chapter Five marks the beginning of the data chapters. Documentary research to plot the national development of an access movement to provide opportunities for study in higher education to disadvantaged groups forms the basis of this chapter. The policy cycle approach is used to chart the recontextualisation of access education as it moved from small practice-led 'pockets of activity' to centre stage of the government's agenda to increase participation in higher education.

## **Chapter Five**

### **From practice to influence: the policy cycle(s) of access education**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter Two reviewed some of the existing research in access education and considered very briefly the claim that its historical roots are in 19<sup>th</sup> century radical, working class adult education. Arguments for the continuing importance of access education despite massification were discussed. This chapter traces, at a national level, how access education as a policy or group of policies was made and re-made through the different contexts of the policy cycle. In Chapter Three I discussed fully, why as an approach for studying access education, the policy cycle is particularly useful. Rather than linear and top-down, the policy making process is seen as cyclical with a two-way flow of influence. It provides a useful analytic framework to consider the key players and different arenas of the three contexts of the policy cycle. This chapter also provides an account of the historical and ideological development of access education. This serves to provide a national context for Chapter Six which outlines the activities of teachers at Northside Sixth Form College (NSFC) in establishing an access course for younger alternative applicants. Chapters Seven and Eight then consider the ways in which the Higher Education Link Course (HELC) as a policy was re-written by one cohort of students.

#### **5.2 Introducing the ‘Episodes’ of Access Education**

Part of the difficulty with a cycle is to know where it starts. In this chapter I focus on three of four ‘episodes’ of access education. The fourth will be dealt with in the final chapter. Using these ‘episodes’ (Parry, 1996) allows a tracing of how various policies, opened up opportunities for study in higher education to disadvantaged groups. Each started as small ‘pockets of activity’ (Parry, 1996) and each involved its own policy cycle. Ideas were then ‘appropriated’ by key players in the national context of influence, and recontextualised as possible partial solutions to social and economic problems. From there, access courses were rationalised and normalised by the introduction of national frameworks and extended in a very small way to include not only mature adults but also

non-traditional populations within 16-19 year old cohorts. The key players in these developments were the tutors in further education, adult education and open colleges, the universities and polytechnics, local education authorities, central government and industrialists as well as the relevant committees, national bodies and representative groups. The influence and involvement of these key players changes in each episode. These episodes are used to signify important shifts in the status of access education and the various ways in which it has been recontextualised and reconfigured as a result of government legislation as well as changing economic and political circumstances. The episodes I outline are different to those used by Parry (1996) because I am working with a different focus and time span. These episodes are –

1973-1977 - ‘Pockets of activity’ of access education

1978-1988 - From equality to quality in policy concerns

1989-1996 - Marketisation and massification: new modalities of access education

1997- onwards - Access education within a Social Inclusion Agenda

The first episode from 1973–1977, Pockets of activity of access education, covers the initial development of the various routes, schemes and courses developed in a very localised way to meet the needs of systemically disadvantaged groups who required the means of re-entering the formal educational system and progressing into higher education. The move from local to national provision began with a crucial intervention in 1978 to promote ‘Access Studies’ by the then Department of Education and Science. This provided an impetus and focus for these ‘pockets of activity’ and led to their expansion.

This intervention marks the start of the second episode from 1978-1988 From equality to quality in policy concerns. This saw the further expansion of access education and covers the ways in which quality and standards were attacked. As a result of this attack a campaigning organisation, the Forum for Access Studies was established, as well as the development of a national framework for recognition for Access education. By 1989 Access courses were considered the third route to higher education.

The third episode 1989–1996 Marketisation and massification: new modalities of access education. This episode saw new forms of access education as it continued to expand and diversify. Changes during this time occurred against a background of radical government legislation to introduce quasi-markets into education at all levels and

massification of higher education.

The fourth episode 1997 onwards Access education within a Social Inclusion Agenda. Its focus is the new Labour agenda on widening participation and considers the lessons to be learnt from the historical and ideological development of access education. This episode is briefly dealt with in the final chapter.

Using four episodes, in the policy cycle enables the charting of the development of access education policy in a complex cyclical way rather than a straight linear development. The mediated character and complex determinations of the policy process will be considered. Three key questions will be investigated in each period; which actors dominate amongst those who shape and implement policies and whose interests did they represent? What are the social, economic and political processes influencing text production, and what were the absences or silences in the policy process?

### **5.3 Episode One: 1973 - 1977 'Pockets of Activity, of Access Education**

Locating the exact beginnings or origins of access education is not an easy task. It is also difficult to get behind texts that were written over 30 years ago and to uncover who wrote them and whose interests they served. Historically, the desire to provide non-vocational schemes and programmes of study and courses for adults outside the formal education system has been a consistent theme in the history of adult education. In the 1960s the scope of such provision widened and the term 'adult and continuing education' was more commonly used (Kelly, 1992). In the 1970s there existed several such schemes, two of which, the Workers Education Association's (WEA) 'Second Chance to Learn' Courses and the Mature Matriculation Scheme run by the universities of the Joint Matriculation Board, had their roots in activities going back to the beginning of the twentieth century and before, as outlined in Chapter Two. Other access provision in the 1970s indicate that the schemes and courses, described below, were 'mainly local, usually small, formally separate and often very different forms of activity' (Parry, 1996:9). Educators in Adult and further and higher education and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) were the key players at this time. Their agendas were to respond to the needs of mature students, in their local areas. These students lacked the educational qualifications necessary to re-enter the formal system. There are several courses and schemes that can be identified as early pioneers in access education providing concrete examples of what

this access provision actually entailed. Firstly, in 1976, Nelson and Colne College with Preston Polytechnic and Lancaster University offered courses for mature students called 'Alternatives to 'A' levels,' providing progression to higher education. These were extended in 1980 to eleven other colleges who adopted the collective name of the Open College of the North-West (Kelly, 1992). A second pioneering course was located at Liverpool University. In 1976-77 the Workers Education Association offered 'Second Chance to Learn' Courses. These were aimed at working class adults who had left school at the minimum age. Thirdly, there were courses specifically aimed at mature women returners. These were often called 'fresh start,' 'threshold' or 're-orientation' courses. One leader in offering this type of course specifically targeted at women was the City Literary Institute in London. Others were sponsored by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) from 1978 onwards. Fourthly, there were credit-based open college organisations which accredited the prior learning of adults and offered a modular course structure. Credits across these modules and colleges could be accumulated as evidence of suitability for study in higher education. Manchester Open College Federation was a leader in this field. Fifthly, pioneers in the field of higher education and further education links were the Polytechnic of North London and the City and East London College. Staff in these institutions were concerned about the under-representation of black social workers. In 1975 tutors set up a Foundation Year of study at the College which led into the *Diploma in Social Work Course*. In 1978 a similar course leading to the B.Ed was established because of concerns about the lack of members of ethnic minorities in the teaching profession. Further links were established between colleges of education and the five inner London Polytechnics sponsored by the ILEA. In the ILEA and elsewhere there was often a robust commitment by teachers, polytechnic lecturers and admission tutors to notions of empowerment and social justice. These courses were designed not only to deal with the under-representation of black people in teaching and social work, they also had a subjective and empowering aim. The pedagogy was usually informal, interactive, drawing on and affirming students' own experience. The model developed by City and East London College and the Polytechnic of North London was –

an integral foundation or access year of the higher education course to which students would progress, rather than a free-standing, multi-exit preparatory year.

(Rimington, 1992: 24)



London provided fertile ground for such developments because of the ILEA's concern about marginalised groups neglected in educational provision, especially those from ethnic minorities. This was evident in texts produced by the ILEA, such as 'An Education Service for the Whole Community ' (1973) and evidence submitted to the Russell Committee of Enquiry into Adult Education (1973).

The types of access education outlined above drew on a variety of different traditions and educational philosophies. Their main aim was to offer mature adults a second chance to learn as well as access to higher education. This enabled working class adults who had been alienated from mainstream education to re-enter the system. These adults often brought with them a wealth of experience and the recognition of this had implications for the structure and pedagogy of the courses provided. Most courses were student centred, structured to draw on the individual strengths and experiences that students brought with them. This has been summed up in relation to female access students -

Access is more than a policy; it is also a set of institutional and pedagogic practices, and a cluster of experiences for adult students.

(Green and Percy, 1991:146)

Such experiences often involved the aims of self-development and preparation for work as well as access to higher education. Further education colleges and higher education institutions collaborated in flexible ways to agree the curriculum content of such courses. They guaranteed progression, usually to specific degrees, on successful completion of the course. However, higher education institutions had the power to define the requirements to be met by these courses. Colleges were the junior partners. Such policies were regarded as part of providing equal opportunities by widening opportunities and diversifying provision.

These 'pockets of activity' of access provision need to be contextualised against the background of an elitist and exclusive system of higher education. Before 1980 only 12.5 % of the 18-19 cohort participated (Benn and Fieldhouse, 1991). Despite the expansion recommended by the Robbins Report in 1963, the relative chances of working class children entering higher education had not improved significantly (Egerton and Halsey, 1993). As can be seen from the types of provision, it was very often groups of disadvantaged students, working-class men and

women, the unemployed and those from ethnic minorities who were targeted rather than just individuals who needed a second chance to learn. In this way access educators were attempting to challenge this exclusivity by changing the social class, gender and 'race' composition of those participating in higher education.

The evidence above indicates that access education as a policy was initiated in the context of practice by educators in further, adult, and higher education. It was not one policy but rather a cluster of policies based on, among other things, attempts to address structural inequalities in participation in higher education. In each of these 'pockets of activity' a policy cycle involving college principals, some government agencies like the MSC, organisations like the WEA as well as teachers in colleges and universities and their students made and re-made these diverse, local forms of access education.

#### **5.4 Episode Two : 1978-1989- From Equality to Quality in Policy Concerns**

The two-way flow of influence is apparent when central government adopted such policies initiated in the context of practice. The first official government policy on access education was in 1978 when the Department of Education and Science wrote a letter of invitation to seven LEAs (London, Avon, Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Haringey, Leicestershire, and Manchester). This invitation was to set up pilot access courses (access studies) targeted, though not exclusively, at recruiting adults from ethnic minorities into the teaching profession, youth and social work. This letter of invitation was a key foundational text in the policy cycle. It was a writerly text (Barthes, cited in Bowe et al, 1992) as it invited LEAs to join in, co-operate, and co-author this policy. The way these courses should be set up and run was not prescribed.

What were the social, economic and political processes influencing text production? The letter of invitation was a response or reaction to other influential texts of the 1970s focussing on black under-achievement and the need for more black teachers. In 1973 the Russell Committee recommended the provision of opportunities for adults whose education had been curtailed and who wished to gain qualifications. It also recommended that access to higher education courses should be established for disadvantaged groups. Such recommendations were not implemented at the time. The letter of invitation (DES, 1978) made no mention of these recommendations. It primarily addressed concerns raised in a White Paper from the Home Office, 'The West Indian

Community' (Home Office, 1977) and resulted from anger and alienation in young black people on the streets of the major cities in particular Notting Hill where riots took place in 1976 (John, 1981). The Labour Government was seriously concerned about economic recession, unemployment and race relations. Access courses were regarded as a possible partial solution to these pressures on Government at the time. Rimington (1992) describes the political and social conditions which came together to forge the first access courses at City and East London College –

The mid to late 70's witnessed the increasing tide of racism in the inner city .....and the adoption by LEAs of anti-racist ( and anti-sexist ) policies to combat this. Arguably genuine educational commitment both at authority and college level to ' compensatory ' programmes of education elided with government concern about the under-representation of ethnic minority people in HE and the professions. Civil order and a workable multi-racial society required there to be successful black role models and mentors for the next generation to identify with and emulate. The chimera of economic growth meant, in addition, tapping sources of unfilled academic talent and potential from all classes, races and from both sexes. Realising this potential involved from the outset removing barriers to HE which were maintained by a rigid adherence to standard 'A' level qualifications as the open sesame to degree level courses.

(Rimington, 1992: 23)

The idea of such courses was however adopted in a very limited way. The letter of invitation from the Department of Education and Science is a cautious, if not very tentative text. It was a pilot to be evaluated and was targeted at Local Education Authorities, with large ethnic minority populations, rather than the colleges themselves. There were various conflicting readings of the agendas behind this intervention. A more cynical view than that of Rimington (1992) regards this as an attempt ' to diffuse disenchantment and disaffection in many alienated communities by creating a black middle-class in an effort to control communities from the inside' (Benn and Burton, 1995: 446). Black professionals (John, 1981) pointed out that *there were* black teachers, many trained in the ex-colonies, available in the 1970s but –

Their entry into the British classroom was not to be so smooth, however. The DES, the Teaching Unions, and just about everyone concerned put up smoke screens all about them, and did all in their power to frustrate those applying for teaching posts. People called into question their standard of English, their communication skills, their knowledge of British culture, their 'stranger' and

‘alien’ status and the validity of their qualifications and, above all, their knowledge of British teaching methods.

(John, 1989:168)

Many of these black teachers ended up in unskilled jobs. It is difficult here to analyse these different texts retrospectively especially to understand why certain voices were heard and others were silent in the policy process. Nonetheless, there is clear evidence that they were all key events in the unfolding of access education.

### **5.5 Episode Two: Mixed Political Motives**

In addition to a lack of clarity about the motivations and intentions for access education, it is also clear that there was a lack of unity of purpose from the different government departments that were involved. A further possible political motive of the Department of Science in supporting access courses was to allow them to ‘keep a significant presence in adult education and training in the face of the colonising strategies of the Manpower Services Commission’ (Lieven, 1998: 162). The MSC had been set up in 1974 by the Heath Government and was answerable to the Secretary of State for Employment. It was mainly concerned with training adults and later the unemployed. It was a powerful and autonomous organisation with power to intervene in the educational system in ways that were not open to the Secretary of State for Education. Chitty (1991) describes this power

—  
with its freedom of manoeuvre, it was in a good position to exploit the inertia and complacency of DES civil servants who placed the youth service, further education and adult education very low on their list of priorities.

(Chitty, 1991:18)

Such DES inertia might explain the space that could be exploited by teachers and lecturers to provide practice-led innovative and empowering access courses in the late 1970’s. Some teachers used the DES initiative for their own purposes —

Already a government response to a specific problem was being creatively transformed by educators into the tradition of using adult education as a tool to counter systemically created disadvantage.

(Lieven, 1989: 161)

Whatever the intentions, the DES could not control the readings of its text and it was used to support the expansion of access provision to a much greater degree than the initial pilot intended.

### **5.6 Episode Two: Evaluating the Success of the DES Pilot**

The DES pilot project lasted for four years during which time careful monitoring and evaluation took place. Millins, the Director of the evaluation, was asked to consider whether there was sufficient evidence for the DES to encourage further the development of these studies. In reporting to a Conservative rather than the Labour Government who had initiated the pilot, Millins (1984) indicated that there was sufficient evidence for access courses to be encouraged further. At least two out of three students had succeeded at the preparatory stage and, of these, two thirds were likely to complete their degrees and diplomas satisfactorily –

Access Studies have vitality and momentum. During the 1982-83 session 16 Authorities and 50 institutions of further and higher education were involved in running such courses in England, both within and outside the DES initiative. These studies are proving to be one of the valuable avenues of Alternative Entry to Higher Education.

(Millins, Project Director, 1984)

In terms of policy effects it would appear that as a result of the ‘letter of invitation’ access courses expanded and a number of people who would have formerly been excluded entered higher education. In real terms much of the development of access courses was outside the remit of the Department of Education and Science.

### **5.7 Episode Two: A Conservative Government Comes to Power**

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher had come to power and as Corrigan (1992) describes, it is difficult to find a trace of sympathy between Thatcherism and the original philosophies of early access education. They come from very different places. Corrigan (1992) characterises the success and expansion of access courses as developing with very little involvement from central Government at this point –

In this national political climate, it is inevitable that access course

development, would at the very least have to develop around national government, given that it would not be led by it. This means that we can genuinely refer to a movement of access courses in terms of a policy process that has developed outside central state sponsorship and therefore constraint.

(Corrigan, 1992:20)

Lieven (1989) suggests a variety of motives for the spread of access provision after the DES initiative. He includes a less philanthropic one –

the institutional priority of survival which helps to explain the rapid adoption of the DES initiative in educational institutions. Rapidly rising unemployment, dramatic technological change and other industrial trends contributed to the decimation of the traditional constituency of further education colleges.

(Lieven, 1989: 162)

Access education remained at this time fundamentally a practice-led policy or cluster of policies. It was given impetus and encouragement from the DES letter of invitation but remained a marginal form of educational provision. However, between 1978 and 1987 the status of access education changed. Originally, as described above, it was a minority provision strongly grounded in notions of social justice and empowerment controlled by teachers and students. It was often considered a low status and marginal area of the curriculum in colleges. By 1987 access education was established as the third route to higher education as well as being considered part of the solution to improving Britain's economic performance. In terms of the policy cycle, power had thus begun to move from the context of local practice to the context of national influence, a more conventional focus of text production. This was not a smooth process and it is important to outline the social, economic and political processes that possibly account for this recontextualisation.

The change of government in 1979 brought with it a different set of concerns about access to higher education and education in general. Neo-liberal or 'new-right,' politicians dominated the thinking behind educational policy making in the 1980s. This period however also saw some tensions between the different interests of the neo-conservatives and the neo-liberals. The aim of the neo-liberals was to reduce the domination of the LEAs by introducing quasi-markets premised on the idea that markets and choice would bring benefits to both the socially disadvantaged and advantaged. Policies like the Assisted Places Scheme (1980), City Technology Colleges (1986) and changes proposed in the 1988 Education Reform Act were aimed at opening up choice to

parents. Schools were given more control over budgets and enrolment, reducing the power of the LEAs. The introduction of quasi markets into the post-compulsory sector was to follow and this will be dealt with more fully in the next episode. The higher education agenda of the Thatcher administration with Sir Keith Joseph as Secretary of State, was to maintain standards and rigour in teaching and learning while at the same time imposing stringent financial cuts. This agenda gave rise to concerns the access route to higher education was possibly leading to a dilution of academic standards.

### **5.8 Episode Two: Was Access Education Lowering Academic Standards?**

The early 1980s saw attacks on 'standards' in relation to access courses. This first centred on the Polytechnic of North London, as indicated above, an access pioneer, in the 1970s. Allegations of political bias and lack of academic rigour were made in relation to two Social Science degree courses operating 'direct entry' access policies. Her Majesty's Inspectorate (DES, 1983) upheld the allegations calling into question the abilities of access students and procedures for ensuring the standards for awards.

The second attack on standards was the Lindop inquiry (1985) into validation in higher education which was set up and reported in 1985. It found no cause for concern about standards in public sector higher education but contained a warning to those institutions taking 'non-standard' entrants -

Institutions should bear in mind the possible dangers involved in themselves organising, or helping to organise, such courses with a view to admitting students from them to their own degree courses. Arrangements of this kind can result in the formation of relationships and understandings which lead to students from Access courses being accepted for degree courses even if they lack the ability to reach degree standard.

(DES, 1985: 70)

The Lindop Report also reinforced the view that A levels were an effective method of selection for higher education in the maintenance of academic quality.

The response from those in the context of practice, running access courses on the ground, felt this concern about standards were unjustified and poorly supported by statistical evidence. They felt it stemmed from a misunderstanding about the further education and higher education collaboration which were intended to guarantee

quality. Subsequent research comparing the results of traditional and non-traditional students indicated that the picture is complex. Research findings in 1984 as part of the Millins Report had indicated that ex-access students achieve significantly better completion and degree results than standard A level students in higher education. He also found that the social class composition of access students differed considerably from those in higher education generally. This indicated that access courses were successful in attracting working class students. Subsequent research (Bourner and Hamed, 1987; Lucas and Ward, 1985; Yates and Davies, 1986) though mostly small in scale and using different definitions of 'non-standard' entrants, does offer some evidence that, especially in the Humanities and social sciences, access students fare as well or better than standard entrants. In engineering, mathematics and science access students fared less well. The statistics produced by this research did however lead Lieven to claim –

Despite some discrepancies between surveys it is clear that access courses have been dramatically successful in enrolling students from systemically disadvantaged groups who, historically, have been largely excluded from the full range of educational provision.

(Lieven, 1989:164)

Whether the successful recruitment had led to a lowering of standards does not seem to be sustained by the small studies undertaken. Nonetheless, the attacks on standards led to contradictory messages, especially as they coincided with a funding crisis with cuts being threatened. Public sector higher education institutions were being encouraged to develop access education by LEAs on the one hand. On the other hand, staff were aware of attacks on quality and standards when the quality of courses was linked to the funding they received.

The attack on standards had the consequence of transforming these 'pockets of activity' into something more like a self-conscious access 'movement' (Parry, 1996: 14). In 1986 a national organisation, the *Forum for Access Studies* was born to represent and promote access courses targeted at ethnic minority, working class, and women as populations under-represented in higher education. This was an important strategy to bring together diverse practitioners to operate tactically to defend access education, in its various forms. The *Forum for Access Studies* journal provided a forum for debate as well



as a source of statistical and research evidence about access education hitherto difficult to find.

### **5.9 Episode Two: Legitimation as the Third Route to Higher Education**

By 1987 access courses were no longer regarded as a threat to academic standards. They were recognised as the third established route into higher education (DES, 1987). The other two routes being traditional A levels and vocational qualifications. By 1989 they had also expanded from being a marginal area of provision –

By 1989 there were approximately 400 Access Courses in 50 LEA's with 6,000 students in Further Education Colleges, Adult and Community Education Centres and Open College Federations  
(Smithers and Robinson 1989).

What were the political, social and economic processes that brought about this change of status? It was the result of a number of concerns of government, industry and the universities, most of who had remained aloof from access provision in the seventies. Panic about the demographic decline in the age range, that is, the number of 18 year olds was set to decline by 32% between 1983 and 1995 (Office of Population Census and Surveys) partly explains the shift in the status of access courses. In the government there were fears about the UK's international competitiveness related to the supply of highly qualified manpower particularly under recruitment in science and technology. An influential report, a key text in understanding the interests of industry in the access education policy process, was commissioned by British Petroleum (B.P.) –

one of the single most consistent messages from industry is that Britain does not educate enough people to a high enough level .....Thus we commissioned the study from which this report derives primarily in order that we should be better informed, and secondly to help guide or further policy debate.

(C.P. King Director Europe British Petroleum Co. quoted in the Foreward in 'Increasing Participation in Higher Education' Smithers and Robinson, 1989)

Political and social analysis is necessary to uncover processes whereby such texts are generated. Why did a major company like BP specifically enter the access policy arena? One answer is to be found in concerns about the low level of skills, poor retention and completion rates and the lack of participation in higher education in Britain compared to

her other major competitors (CIHE, 1987, CBI, 1989). Related to this was the skills shortage due to the lack of take-up in degrees in engineering, science and technology. Britain was forced to compete in an increasingly global market where flexible specialisation was required. This, coupled with changes in the secondary school curriculum, GCSE, AS levels, revised A levels and Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative, had led universities to review and broaden their entrance policies. In further education colleges the success of access courses and the need to find new and different constituencies of students had also contributed to this growth. The interest in access education from these new key players, central government, industrialists and the elite universities, in the context of influence, was greeted with some cynicism and concern from teachers involved in access provision in the context of practice. Commenting on a report which stressed the need to increase participation in higher education (Smithers and Robinson, Increasing Participation in Higher Education, 1989) Green and Percy note the change in status of access courses -

Flavour of the month, the notion of access to higher education thus appears on influential agendas. Sponsored by BP, the largest blue-chip company in the land, the report quoted above provides further evidence of the emphasis currently accorded to 'access'.

(Green and Percy, 1991: 145)

This was especially true as the official discourses of widening access had shifted from equity arguments to economic benefits. This involved simply encouraging more students to participate because of a fall in the numbers of traditional 16-19 year old A level applicants rather than the original motives of access educators -

the point of Access courses, as expressed to us by the Director of the Manchester Open College Federation, is to be an 'open and enabling process' giving "access to good advice, to job opportunities, and building the whole human being". They are not intended to be "a patching up exercise because of the demographic trough".

(Smithers and Robinson, 1989: 32.)

So by the late 1980s, access education, which until comparatively recently, had been an interest shared by only a few educationalists in different areas of the country, had become one of the major policy issues in post-school education (Tight, 1993).

### 5.10 Episode Two: Recognition, Regulation and Normalisation

A further consequence of the discourse of concerns about quality and standards from central government was a national system for the accreditation of access courses. This was developed between 1987–1989 by the Council for National Academic Awards and the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals which produced a committee called the *Access Courses Recognition Group*. The main role of this committee was to license validating agencies to approve courses and award kitemarks. Such Authorised Validating Agencies (AVAs) consisted of one or more institutions of higher education in partnership with local further education colleges. The main agenda of the AVAs was to control a diverse collection of courses in a number of different institutions and sectors in order to ensure quality and consistency. Davies and Parry's (1993) research, summarised in Chapter Two, argues that this change in government policy signalled a shift in the direction of a mass system of higher education. The framework, they feel, represented both an exercise in legitimisation and an indication of much larger changes in post-secondary education.

While there was some welcoming of a national framework from access educators as proper recognition of their work, there was also considerable disquiet. Would this framework lessen their freedom to design and run courses to meet local needs? More directly, would the emancipatory and equality aspects of the diverse practice of access education be threatened? As Parry and Percy point out -

.....there was the fear that what some regarded as core principles and processes - positive action, integrated curricula, collaborative working and enhanced progression - might be displaced or diluted in the quest for wider acceptability.

(Parry and Percy, 1995:5)

Some practitioners felt that despite the drawbacks of the national framework it -

was accomplished with a regard for lightness of touch, devolution and flexibility, in the spirit of access philosophy.

(Rimington, 1992:28)

However, the scope of access education appeared to be narrowing with the main aim becoming access to higher education rather than as originally conceived as a strategy in which access to higher education (under graduate degrees) featured as one of a range of possible options or routes for individual learners. Access courses, kitemarked and

validated, packaged and legitimated seemed to be replacing the original concept of access education with its emphasis on a diversity of schemes and routes. The power had moved from day-to-day practitioners to 'another layer of professionalised access advocacy' (Diamond, 1999: 185) the people who controlled the validating systems and organisations.

### **5.11 Episode Three 1989-1997: Massification, Markets and New Modalities**

This episode saw contradictory forces at work and new key players entered the access arena. From 1989 onwards, access education continued to expand and diversify against a background of radical government legislation. This was aimed at introducing quasi-markets into post-compulsory education and massification to higher education. Following what was perceived as the successful introduction of quasi-markets into the secondary sector of education, the government's two White Papers, 'Education and Training for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (1991)' and 'Higher Education: A New Framework (1991)' set out plans for further, Adult and higher education. The seeds of marketisation had already been sewn in 1988 with the Education Reform Act which, among other changes, devolved budgets to schools and colleges and removed the Polytechnics from the control of local authorities. In 1992 legislation made further education colleges and sixth form colleges independent of local authority control and a new funding council, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) was established. In higher education the distinction between Universities and Polytechnics was to disappear and a single funding body established the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) marking the end of the binary system. The numbers in higher education had expanded massively and quickly without a corresponding increase in resources. Between 1988 and 1993 the participation rate for young people had doubled to 30% and the number of students in higher education had increased by 40% (Parry and Percy, 1995: 2). The government's aim was to obtain better value for money. A market philosophy was imposed encouraging universities to run on business lines and compete with each other. Such market 'freedom' was accompanied by greater central government control through funding mechanisms, quality assurance, inspections and the research selectivity exercise. In higher education funding was to be linked stringently to student numbers and research output. Some further education college principals were delighted to be free of Local Authority control but their new-found freedom was to be centrally controlled and as Spours and Lucas suggest, was –

Best understood as part of the attempt by Government to form an education and training market with the emphasis on institutional competition, private managerialism and the concept of customer care. However a closer analysis of the FEFC model of incorporation reveals the 'FE experiment' to be a market hybrid in which local market competition is combined with strong central control from the FEFC with a mission to promote the rapid growth of the sector at reduced unit cost. (Spours and Lucas, 1996: 5)

Legislation also put further education colleges firmly on the map to improve participation and retention rates as well as improving learning opportunities for adults. Up until 1997 the efficiency of these changes have been investigated through reviews, including, the Dearing Review of 16-19 Qualifications (1996) and of Higher Education (1997) and the Capey Review of GNVQ Assessment (1996). These reviews were all key texts that contributed further to the shaping and re-shaping of access education.

### **5.12 Episode Three: Was Access Education Under Threat from these Changes?**

In terms of the policy cycle what was the new relationship between the context of practice and the context of influence? Who were the new key players and whose interests did they serve? Access practitioners were alarmed at some of the legislative changes (Access News, 1991). The uncoupling of further education colleges from LEAs was feared. In the past this relationship had been perceived as productive in terms of access education. Some LEAs, notably the ILEA (abolished in 1988 by the Education Reform Act), had sponsored the growth of access schemes and encouraged the links between colleges and polytechnics. There was a fear that excluding LEAs could fragment access arrangements as these would have to be organised college by college. The strong managerialism and aggressive market strategies of some colleges made access practitioners fearful that bidding to the FEFC for funding for access courses for systemically disadvantaged adults would not be a priority. Policy documents indicated that the further education sector was now primarily aimed at 16-19 year olds and concerns were expressed that non-vocational, liberal adult education would not survive. It was also felt that the legislation missed an opportunity to establish a unitary system of post-16 education with the divisions between further and higher education rendered obsolete.

### 5.13 Episode Three: New Access Education for New Times?

Such fears of access practitioners have proved unfounded and access education survived and thrived in this episode. Two developments are the focus of the remainder of this chapter. Firstly, new and flexible arrangements between further and higher education provided new opportunities for access education. Secondly, the legislation failed to reform A levels though new vocational qualifications, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), were introduced in 1992. Teachers of the 16-19 age range in schools and colleges developed schemes to provide opportunities for study in higher and further education for disadvantaged students like the HELC. Such schemes were the result of social justice concerns as well as frustration with the narrowness and exclusivity of A levels and some universities' over-dependence on them as entry qualifications. Thus access education had a small but new constituency.

Parry (1996) describes how colleges of further education and higher education developed wider and more flexible links to provide opportunities for participation. This was through the practice of franchising, which meant that foundation year studies in undergraduate education and joint degrees were taught in further education colleges on behalf of the universities. Such arrangements disturbed existing ideas about access education –

Unlike access courses based mainly in further education and targeted at the adult population, foundation year studies offered direct forms of access to higher education for young as well as mature students, and for the conventionally certificated as well as the formally under-qualified. Not only might such programmes be taught in the more access-friendly context of further education, as part of collaborative arrangements of various kinds, but their purposes were essentially plural, with teaching geared to preparation and 'remediation' as well as to conversion.

(Parry, 1996:35)

Many of these flexible arrangements were eventually merged with more conventional access courses to provide access to higher education for both mature and 16-19 year old students. Through Open College networks which had also developed extensively through the late 1980s and early 1990s, accreditation for modules and units were offered flexibly to a wider mix of students. Access courses had had to surrender some of their former specificity but as Parry (1996) indicates -

these and related developments suggest the emergence of a 'third wave' of

Access education in the 1990s based on new diversities and new modalities in the qualifying environments of further and higher education and on new styles of accreditation applied to recognise learning undertaken in formal and informal settings.

(Parry, 1996:36)

#### **5.14 Episode Three: New 'Pockets of Activity' in the Context of Practice**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s similar 'pockets of activity' developed to open up schemes and routes for 16-19 year olds, as in the early days of access education for mature adults. Many teachers were influenced by the success of such access education and frustrated by the Government's persistent refusal to reform A levels, despite the repeated message from education reports (The Higginson Report, 1988; A British Baccalaureat, 1990). Space was opened up for teachers to develop other types of qualifications aimed at preparing a broader range of students for further study including access to higher education.

Schemes were developed like the *Recording Achievement and Higher Education Project* based in the Wigan LEA involving fifteen universities and colleges and eleven local education authorities and funded jointly by the LEAs and the Department of Employment. This scheme was aimed at exploring the use of Records of Achievement (a portfolio of evidence of attainment) by higher education admissions tutors as an alternative to, or in addition to, traditional qualifications.

The *North Worcestershire Higher Education Partnership* of ten schools and six universities guaranteed entry to a wide range of degree and Higher National Diploma courses. Entry was based on a personal statement, an academic profile and an action plan as well as academic qualifications and on this basis students were offered entry with significantly lower than normal grades. A similar scheme was the *Two Towns Project* run by Keele University and Staffordshire Polytechnic with three schools in an inner city area of Stoke-on-Trent. Its aim was to raise educational attainment and expectations among pupils and parents in a traditionally low achieving area where there was little commitment to study beyond the age of sixteen. It was intended to encourage the aspiration to progress into further education and higher education. Limited funding for this came from the *Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council* and the *Paul Hamlyn Foundation*.

Thirdly, some universities and polytechnics opened their facilities to young people in the surrounding area: for example the *University of Liverpool Curriculum Enrichment Programme* worked with one hundred and thirty two schools and colleges developing skills through group projects accredited and validated by the university. This was aimed at developing skills like communication and problem-solving which claimed to be highly valued by industrialists and higher education admissions tutors. Funding came from local companies like ICI, Unilever, and British Telecom.

In London the ILEA developed links in the 1980s between some of its schools and Sussex University, in what was known as the 'SAIL' (Sussex And Inner London), where pupils were offered places with lower than normal grades on the grounds that they were disadvantaged by amongst other factors, attending London's inner city comprehensive schools.

In 1990 British Petroleum's ' *Aiming for a College Education* ' was launched. This was a five-year programme concentrated on three geographical areas with a commitment of £3 million for schemes to raise the aspirations of young people to improve staying on rates after sixteen and Access to Higher Education. Five inner London Boroughs were involved in schemes to provide role models through mentoring and tutoring. They provided information, advice and the marketing of career choices including progression to further and higher education.

Such schemes, aimed at new constituencies of younger disadvantaged students, were the context in which the HELC, the focus of this thesis, evolved. At NSFC the HELC, an access-type course within an A level framework, was established in 1988. Initially links were developed with two local Polytechnics who offered lower than normal entry grades to students identified as having the potential for under-graduate study but having suffered from social and educational disadvantage. Research into this course and one cohort of students is the focus of this study.

In this third episode of the policy cycle of access education, new constituencies and new ways of delivering access opportunities developed. This was through franchising and the growth of Open Colleges. New key players emerged with more emphasis on 16-19 year old students and teachers from secondary schools and sixth form colleges rather than further education colleges. Funding from multi-national companies, like BP, British Telecom, Unilever and charitable trusts like the Paul Hamlyn Foundation were more



apparent in this episode compared to Episode One.

The continuing success and development of access education will be the focus of Episode Four beginning with the election of a Labour Government in 1997 when all major policy texts supported the concept of 'access' through policies aimed at widening participation through inclusive education and lifelong learning. This will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

### **5.15 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have situated the evolution of the HELC, the focus of this thesis, into the broader development of access education. This chapter traces the development of access education through three 'episodes' from 1970s to 1997. Through the various contexts of the policy cycle, access education has been made and re-made to meet the needs of different social, political and economic conditions. Access education has been remarkably successful at re-inventing itself, finding new constituencies, modalities and diversities. Its success could be attributed to the fact that access practitioners were able to write and re-write the script. In the first episode they were engaged in what was considered low status, marginal activity outside the control of the central state (Corrigan, 1992). Access education was indeed a writerly text (Barthes, cited in Bowe, 1992) at this time.

Some of this freedom was undoubtedly lost in the second episode, when the status of access education changed. It became part of the solution to improving Britain's international competitiveness and ensuring adequate recruits for higher education. This was the beginning of a mass system required to ensure national and international economic survival. At this point access education was rationalised, normalised and legitimated. Some of the diversity was lost with the emphasis on access courses that were approved and kitemarked rather than a variety of routes and schemes. The text became more readerly (Barthes, cited in Bowe, 1992) in the second episode.

Shifting boundaries between further and higher education provided new access activities through franchising arrangements in the third episode. It is possible to claim that these new more individualised modes of access education signalled the death of the collective and emancipatory aims of the old access movement. However, such modularised and individualised access provision can also be claimed to have ensured its

survival. New constituencies also emerged in this period in the form of ‘non–standard’ A level students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such students required policies to provide learning support and opportunities for study in higher education as alternatives to the three A level route.

This chapter has tracked the policy cycle of access education nationally. It traced how access education as a policy or group of policies was made and re-made through the different contexts of the policy cycle. This provides a national context for the following four chapters which focus down one such access policy, the HELC.

## Chapter Six

### Text Production: the Case and its Context

#### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter traced the policy cycle of access education as a national movement, through three 'episodes' of its development from 1973 to 1997. This chapter focuses down on a case study of one access course established by teachers in NSFC. This course was established towards the end of the second episode from 1978–1989. By this time access courses for mature adults were established as the third route to higher education. They were regarded as a 'success story' in widening and increasing participation. Influenced by such success, as well as other factors, Humanities teachers developed an access scheme aimed at providing opportunities for study in higher education for non-traditional A level students. This chapter investigates the context of text production, marking the beginning of the policy cycle of the NSFC. Subsequent chapters investigate how the HELC as a policy was made and re-made in the contexts of practice and outcomes. The chapter includes an analysis of how changes in the context of influence, in particular, legislation affecting local government and higher and further education, impinged on the development of this local policy.

The chapter has six key sections. The first section provides a brief chronology of events in order to situate later discussion and analyses. The second section recognises that this policy text entered existing patterns of inequality and the structure of local education markets in the London borough of Northside. These are described in order to contextualise the production of the HELC. The third section examines how the policy came to be written by outlining the social processes and compromises of its production. It introduces the teachers as the 'official' authors of the text. The fourth section considers the silences of text production, drawing on data from teachers to discuss the unspoken aspects of text production, the issues left unsaid or unresolved. These refer to some of the constraints on this policy or what Ball (1994a) refers to as 'policy as discourse'. The fifth section outlines how legislative changes in the context of influence impacted on this policy and contributed to its demise. The sixth section pulls together the various strands of the production of this text and its fate and makes links with subsequent chapters.

## 6.2 A Chronology of the HELC and its Context

This chapter focuses on policy as text production. There were in fact few ‘physical’ texts in the form of documents produced about the course however, in previous chapters I have traced the influences of a range of texts on the establishment of HELC. The policy developed more through ‘custom and practice’. In this sense it is what Bowe et al (1992) drawing on the work of Barthes would call a ‘writerly text’ as it left space for creative interpretation rather than passive consumption.

As well as using ‘texts’ this chapter draws on two key data sources: my own insider knowledge as a member of staff and interviews with a number of other members of staff. These were two course tutors, Angela Downside and Joy White (who continued to run the course after my departure from the College in 1991), two careers teachers, Mary Benton who was involved in the initiation of the scheme and John Barton who provided progression guidance for its students and two Humanities teachers, the Head of Humanities, Rosalind Burns and another member of the Humanities Department Jenny Dean. I will also draw on texts which came to represent the HELC as a policy; a leaflet about the course aimed at parents and students, a section in the prospectus, as well as local newspaper articles.

In order to contextualise the discussion and analysis, I provide the following table as a chronology of key events. The table highlights the changes that occurred during a thirteen year period in the history of NSFC. The aim is to provide a clear context for the development of the HELC and to show changes at both local and national level that affected this policy development.

**TABLE 1: A CHRONOLOGY OF THE HELC AND ITS CONTEXT**

Date	National change	LEA Change	NSFC change
1984			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NSFC established as a 16-19 institution serving 5 partner schools in the local borough. The new college replaced existing sixth forms. A Director, two deputy directors and eight full-time co-ordinators were appointed and accommodated on two sites.</li> <li>The enrolment for the College was 424 students (FTE)</li> </ul>
1988	Education Reform Act Abolished the ILEA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Polytechnic Link Course (PLC) established by the Humanities Department of NSFC. First cohort of 12 students were recruited to take two A levels. The group of students was provided with two and a half hours of additional learning support per week. Support sessions were double staffed.</li> <li>Links with two Polytechnics were established for higher education progression.</li> <li>The enrolment for the College was 808 students.</li> </ul>
1989			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Second cohort of 15 students recruited for the PLC.</li> </ul>
1990		ILEA abolished - as a result local borough assumed responsibility for all schools and colleges including NSFC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Third cohort of 12 students were recruited for the PLC. A third Polytechnic became a link institution.</li> </ul>
1991			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change of PLC Tutor. New tutor and co-ordinator of Humanities appointed. Fourth cohort of 13 students recruited for PLC.</li> </ul>
1992	Formal abolition of the binary system of HE by the Further and Higher Education Act		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research for this study commenced with the third cohort of the course and its teachers. Course re-named Higher Education Link Course (HELC).</li> <li>NSFC in the top ten of the <i>Sunday Times</i> top 250 schools and colleges in England and Wales.</li> <li>Fifth cohort of 12 students recruited for the HELC.</li> </ul>
1993		Restructuring of NSFC to Federal college as a result of a merger of NSFC and two other colleges in the borough. This resulted in shared management and governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sixth cohort of 12 students recruited for HELC.</li> </ul>
1994			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seventh cohort of 10 students recruited for the HELC</li> </ul>
1995			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decision taken to discontinue HELC</li> </ul>
1997			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staffing and budget cuts cause rationalisation of provision across each of the 4 campuses. Departure of many staff including two of the senior management team of NSFC. Fears about future provoke public meetings and articles in the local press.</li> </ul>

### **6.3 Poverty and Privilege: Local Education Markets**

In order to understand the factors which contributed to the HELC being developed it is necessary to consider the educational profile of the borough in which NSFC was located. Northside's secondary schools have always had a poor profile in terms of examination results. Recently with published national indicators and league tables this failure has much higher public profile. Northside is among the LEAs at the bottom of the national examination league tables. The number of 16 year olds gaining more than five A\* - C grades in GCSE examinations in 1996 was 22.8% compared to 26.3% for Inner London and 39.9% nationally (source: Northside School examination results, 1996). As a measure of social and economic disadvantage, the report uses the proxy indicator of the number of pupils eligible for free school meals. In 1996 the average for Northside's secondary schools was 57.4% compared to an inner London average of 49.6% and a greater London average of 33.1% (source: Form 7 - 1996, secondary school total). Free school meals statistics give an indication of the level of poverty in the borough. This poverty is rendered somewhat invisible by the borough's affluent image. In reality, deprivation and poverty exist alongside wealth and privilege. Since the 1970s these divisions have polarised, as the aspirant, relatively affluent working class moved out to the suburbs. This resulted in the problem of falling rolls and greater competition between schools for pupils. Such divisions have caused antagonisms and increasing rivalries between and within middle class and working class parents. These conflicts have often centred around the borough's schools, especially the primary schools, where middle class parents were seen to monopolise the 'good' schools, leaving the local working class parents feeling resentful. Many of these parents came from very run-down council estates while the rich minority were concentrated in and around the borough's gentrified Georgian squares. 48.2% of the borough's population lived in council accommodation. A large percentage, 30.7% of children aged 0-4 lived in lone parent households (source: Northside Borough Statistics, 1996).

Explanations for the poor performance of Northside's schools derive from a complex interplay of these factors. 34.4% of secondary pupils in Northside were bilingual: that is, they had a home language other than, or in addition to, English. The language census in 1994 indicated that 108 different languages other than English were recorded as being spoken by Northside school pupils. This illustrates the cultural richness

of the school population and the challenges facing teachers who provided language support to these pupils. Some school catchment areas also had transient populations with refugee children from Somalia and Kurdistan. Some of these children came to school with very little English and prior formal education and for some, their experiences of civil war had traumatised them. This placed pressure on resources and teachers. Providing a caring and supportive environment for such pupils does not sit easily with having to publish and be judged by exam results or raw data. With a fairer 'value added' approach such schools may well have been rated more highly.

The discourses of the market and formula funding make it difficult to explain the failure of inner city schools without blaming the teachers, and without pupils and parents being regarded as 'poor choosers' (Ball, 1994a). A process of polarisation characterised Northside's schools. As funding followed students, so unpopular schools lost out. This resulted in poorer resources and inability to recruit well qualified and experienced but expensive teachers. There is some evidence (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995) that the introduction of quasi markets through formula funding, Local Management of Schools and Grant Maintained schools with the Education Reform Act in 1988 exacerbated the effects of competition between schools in boroughs like Northside. Such policies may also have contributed to the exodus from the borough of middle class pupils to neighbouring boroughs where the schools were perceived as achieving better academic results. Some middle class students then moved back to Northside for their Post-16 education to attend NSFC.

It was the middle class parents, many of them 'new middle-class' and the agents of symbolic control (Bernstein, 1977) who lobbied and fought for NSFC to be established as a centre of excellence to replace the small sixth forms in most of the borough's schools in 1984. This was despite strong opposition from local secondary school teachers and some parents. The first Director of NSFC had a high media profile and the ability to attract generous funding from the Inner London Education Authority. She rigorously hand-picked her staff when she set up the College and was skilled at promoting an image of the pursuit of academic excellence combined with commitment to catering for local students with a range of educational needs. The College was over-subscribed and popular with 'new' middle-class parents in the borough the most prominent of whom were politicians, journalists, broadcasters and actors. Such parents bear resemblance to those of

the 'new middle class' students at Spa Town college researched by Aggleton (1987).

Primary and secondary education in Northside was regarded as very poor with 'new' and old middle class parents opting to use schools in neighbouring boroughs or the independent sector. The first Director of NSFC managed to change the borough's reputation for Post-16 education. In the media NSFC was applauded as 'Top of the Class' (Northside Newspaper, 15/7/95) while the LEA was described as 'Bottom-of-the-Class Borough' (Guardian, 21/12/1995) and the secondary schools as 'Schools for Scandal' (Northside Newspaper, 18/2/96). An article in a local newspaper illustrates these tensions in the borough as well as the strong market position of NSFC –

**Queue here for a priceless education.**

well - heeled parents who have parted with an arm and a leg to buy a decent education for their offspring should read no further. They are about to learn an expensive lesson. It won't be popular but the truth must out. That priceless commodity - educational excellence - that you paid so much for is available at Northside Sixth Form College and it won't ( it can't ) cost you a penny.....Deputy director, \_\_\_\_\_, can boast of exam results last summer that would be the envy of many private establishments. But if you think there are lies, damned lies and exam results he will point to the young refugees from the private sector who are queuing up to get into Northside Sixth Form College.

(Local newspaper, 20 /12/1990)

One reading of the article could be that the authors felt that endorsement by local middle class parents and their children who would normally use the private sector was necessary to legitimate and highlight the College's excellence. The article then makes reference to an interview with two Northside students who were privately educated up to the age of sixteen and three students, one with special educational needs, and one on the first cohort of the HELC, who came from local comprehensives. They are all very positive about the college, its resources, teachers and its excellent A level results. These were achieved through methods that do not involve 'divisive selection procedures' the article claims and then concludes -

but the unique achievement of Northside Sixth Form College is that it is giving real educational opportunities to lots of kids who, lacking support and encouragement at home, would have been alienated by the traditional school



sixth form. The old system let them down. The new one, as a grateful student explained to his tutor, reaches the parts other sixth forms can't reach.

(local newspaper, 20 /12/1990 )

This reputation for excellence lead to intense competition for places at the college. Students literally queued for places from the early hours of the morning. In this market situation, applicants from outside the borough, mainly middle class, with good GCSE results were in a strong position to get places on A level courses. The poor academic performance of the borough's secondary schools resulted in some local, mainly working class students from schools with poor GCSE results unable to compete. The college did operate a system of local partner school students first, but there were selection procedures that required four GCSE passes at Grade A-C to qualify for a place on an A level course. The college had set up a range of vocational and pre-vocational courses to cater for such local students. However, some students preferred to spend a year taking new GCSE courses in order to gain the necessary qualifications for A level study. Others wanted to study two A levels as well as one or two GCSEs. It was for such non-traditional students that the HELC was designed.

#### **6.4 Protecting the Interests of Local Students**

As a result of the poor educational profile of the local borough, as well as other factors, Humanities teachers at NSFC, decided to set up the Polytechnic Link Course which became the Higher Education Link Course in 1992 with the formal end of the binary system. It was described in the College prospectus –

This course is designed for students who have been identified by their teachers during their GCSE or CPVE courses in schools or at the College. These students will have three or four GCSEs at grade C or above and will be capable of taking two 'A' levels and going onto Higher Education but will benefit from extra support sessions each week. The course includes work on oral and written skills, help with researching topics in the A level syllabus as well as activities designed to improve self-confidence. This course has links with degree courses at Northside Polytechnic and Oakfields Polytechnic.

(NSFC Prospectus, 1989)

The teachers who established the course had several motives and aims. They wished to provide access opportunities for non-traditional students. They held a strong

commitment to keeping local students within the educational system because NSFC had replaced the sixth forms in their schools. Teachers, some of whom had worked in local schools, were therefore keen to see that students from partner schools were catered for. The college was extremely popular and over-subscribed and, in the local economies of schooling, students from these partner schools with poor GCSE results could easily lose out to better qualified A level applicants from elsewhere. This situation required a policy to provide distinct forms of learning support making it possible for such students to succeed at A level. As Mary Benton explains –

*There were many more young people applying to the college who weren't in a sense traditional A level candidates. They wanted to do A levels but they did not have the GCSE background or were not seen to be young people who were going to achieve high level grades. I guess a number of us including the Head of Humanities and the Humanities teachers, John and myself, all realised that we needed to have something more structured; something that would actually provide a framework for 'that kind of student' to be able to get a chance at going to university or using whatever they gained in employment.*

(Interview: Mary Benton, June, 1997)

So the first factor which explains why the policy was necessary was the poor educational profile of the local borough. There was also a commitment by staff to this 'new kind of student'. They were non-traditional A level applicants with poor GCSE qualifications who did not want to enrol on the vocational and pre-vocational courses on offer. This policy was an attempt by the teachers at NSFC to compensate for former disadvantage particularly, under-achievement in the borough's schools.

## **6.5 An Orthodox Access Course or Using an A level Framework ?**

Prior to setting up the course there were heated debates in the Humanities department about whether students should be provided with a course that was more like the orthodox access courses, described in Chapter 4, for mature adults. These provided modules of work outside an A level framework which were accredited by institutions of higher education. Some teachers took a radical position and argued that using A level subjects as the basis of the course was setting such students up to fail. They favoured a much more creative modular approach. This would be more cross-curricular, innovative and more accessible than the strongly framed and classified (Bernstein, 1977) A level subjects on offer. Some staff supported their arguments with evidence of the success of access

courses for mature adults. They pointed out the willingness of some Polytechnics to take such students without A levels. Jenny Dean had worked as the principal of a private tutorial college before coming to NSFC. She had had success at getting students into university without formal qualifications. She describes this experience –

*I'd become aware through working with overseas students and dealing with qualification issues for entry to higher education that it was possible to go to university without the mandatory requirements. So this made me aware that there was the possibility of a different way of going into university. I also had a sense that some of the students that I was used to coming across or teaching often had abilities that weren't reflected very well in the examination process that they went through, you know, A levels, so I thought it would be good if the college considered doing some kind of course that would give our students access to university.*

(Interview: Jenny Dean, April, 1997)

As indicated in Chapter 4 access courses were becoming accepted as the third route to higher education in the mid 1980s and the philosophy behind them was being disseminated through Post-16 networks. Some Northside teachers were inspired by attending a conference on access education –

*Yes, it meant there was quite a lot of optimism at that time, wasn't there? The idea that you could create this access course and we went to a couple of conferences which talked about access for 16-19 year olds to higher education. But, I mean it became fairly evident that universities and higher education institutions wanted the A level as a kind of gold standard.*

(Interview: Angela Downside, April, 1997)

So contradictory forces were at work. On the one hand access courses had been proved as a successful alternative to A levels but there was a fear that taking this route may disadvantage students in terms of their choice of higher education institutions. Other teachers were concerned that an orthodox access course might not suit the needs of these non-traditional applicants to A level courses. As Mary Benton explains –

*First of all I think we had an assumption about access that it was more successful for older learners who have got more in terms of life experiences and could bring those sort of experiences and learning from employment to their study. Younger students obviously lacked confidence, lacked those kind of experiences and skills in some cases. There was evidence that universities would not be keen on taking younger students without A levels and there was also a currency around A level that would appeal to employers even if*

*students hadn't necessarily passed. It was a combination of these kind of issues and assumptions that led us towards this notion of not a straight forward access course on the adult model but a support package which would enable non-traditional A level students to get A level basically.*

(Interview: Mary Benton, June, 1997)

Several factors affected the policy process as at this time. Polytechnics and universities wanted most students to matriculate but at the same time access courses for mature adults without A levels were becoming more widespread and accepted. This was prior to massive expansion and the introduction of markets into higher education in 1992, heralding a more flexible approach to admissions.

The frustration with the narrowness and inflexibility of A levels and the lack of a good vocational option to suit the needs of non-traditional applicants was also a spur to these teachers to develop this course. At this time, as indicated in Chapter 5, teachers in different parts of England were engaged in developing access schemes. This was to open up opportunities for students in the 16–19 age range who were not in the traditional A level mould. Despite widespread support for the reform or abolition of A levels, from the Confederation of British Industry (1989), Trade Union Congress (1989) and the Labour Party (1989), successive Conservative governments ignored evidence and reports like the Higginson Committee Report in 1988. At that time only 25% of each age cohort took the academic route of A levels, the remaining 75% were offered training. In this divided system, A levels were regarded as narrow and over-specialised and vocational training as low status and poorly co-ordinated. Staying on rates for 16 year olds in the UK were 50% which compared very unfavourably with our competitors, for example, France 78% and Japan 92% (Source: DES, 1990). The consequences of this are spelt out in an influential text of the time arguing for a British Baccalaureat to replace this divided system -

Britain's education system is marked by low 'staying-on' rates and poor comparative performance because it is *divided*. Most importantly, it divides 'academic' pupils from the rest through the different institutions, different curricula, different modes of study and above all different qualifications which cater for the two groups. Our qualifications system resembles an educational obstacle course and is designed to 'weed out' the majority of pupils. We call this the early selection - low participation system.

(Finegold, Keep, Miliband, Raffae, Spours and Young, 1990)

Humanities teachers at NSFC were critical of the 'weeding out' process and the resulting

exclusive nature of their A level students and wanted to broaden their intake. In the absence of good vocational options for non-traditional A level students, they worked with an assumption that all students could do Social Science and Humanities A levels with the necessary learning support-

*We had this image at the College that whatever material you were working with you could always inspire students and make them dedicated and motivated and teach them something worthwhile.*

*(Interview: Jenny Dean, April, 1997)*

For all the reasons outlined above, teachers opted for a course which used an A level framework plus learning support, rather than a more radical cross curricular and modular access course. This illustrates that the policy that emerged was a compromise: between teachers who wished to offer the more radical option of an orthodox access course outside the A level framework and those who preferred a safer route. This route it was felt had currency in the labour market and with a range of institutions of higher education.

## **6.6 Personal Versus Structural Motives**

Another factor which explains why the policy was established was the arrival of a new co-ordinator of Humanities, Rosalind Burns in 1988. She described how two strands came together to make the policy possible. Teachers at the college wanted to develop an access scheme to bypass or subvert traditional A levels. At the same time some local universities were interested in establishing links that would enable disadvantaged students to progress onto degree courses. The discussion and debate had taken place about the need for an access type course but it was Rosalind Burns who translated the ideas into action. She explains how she did this -

*AK. Other people had talked about it. Why do you think it was you who got it off the ground?*

*R.B. ... Because I think I was new to the college and new to the post and partly it was just that I liked the idea of setting up something that was new and would kind of take us forward. It seemed as if the place was ready for a new initiative... and although there was some reluctance because students would still have to get their A levels. There were the resources available and staff who were sufficiently interested, particularly you, to take it forward. So we were able to build a course at the college which was designed around these students. We were able to provide these skills because you and other*

*members of staff had the study skills to do the study skills work that was the basis of it I was new to the job and wanted a new initiative I suppose and had the contacts... so we got it off the ground very quickly in the end.*

(Interview: Rosalind Burns, February, 1997)

This was an important aspect of policy text production with particular staff, like Rosalind Burns, feeling ownership and a personal commitment to getting a scheme up and running and then making it work. She persuaded the senior management of the College to provide the resources for the scheme. It was presented as meeting the needs of students from partner schools. It was in line with the provision of equal opportunities. She and Mary Benton drew on contacts they had in two Polytechnics which they persuaded to become part of the scheme. Mary Benton describes the process –

*It was a mixture of pragmatism and assumption really. They were both local, some of the students we were looking to support were not prepared to travel a long way to university. The Polytechnic of Northside was just around the corner and it had a good reputation for access. Oakfields was not too far away and had a good reputation for Humanities and for taking non-traditional learners. I went to a number of open days and talked to some of the careers advisors. We had had experience of students going to some universities and then dropping out, not liking it, not being able to survive and all that sort of stuff and that influenced our choice of institutions.*

(Interview: Mary Benton, June, 1997)

The Polytechnics were not expecting to recruit many students from the course so it was on a very small scale. Mary Benton suspected that Oakfield was hoping to fill some of their modules that weren't recruiting.

So the resulting policy and the shape it took at this stage in its policy cycle was the result of conjunctures of interest. The motives were not all altruistic nor were they necessarily about providing equal opportunities. They were often a mixture of factors including self-interest as well as a commitment to social justice. Careers could be enhanced through developing an exciting new initiative. Staff in polytechnic departments could ensure that they recruited their numbers with students who seemed likely to complete their degree courses because of their study skills training. There was a political commitment to protecting the interests of local working class and ethnic minority students in what was perceived as a middle class college. It was exciting and professionally interesting to set up a course aimed at subverting A levels by challenging the idea that only academic students with good GCSEs could succeed on them. Access

was a strong and successful discourse to be involved with at the time. Ultimately though, this policy was a compromise to appease a number of interests. It was a safe route, using as it did the A level framework and targeting a small cohort of students.

## 6.7 What was the HELC?

A leaflet produced to explain the course describes the policy –

The Link course is a support course offered to a group of Humanities students who will normally be identified at the college during one year CPVE or GCSE course by their tutors or subject teachers. Increasingly we are taking students who come directly from schools. These students may have under-achieved for reasons of educational and social disadvantage, and in particular lack of confidence in considering higher education as a feasible option.

(Leaflet: produced, 1990)

The criteria used for educational and social disadvantage are not spelt out in the document. They were used informally and flexibly and included: no tradition of higher education in their family; education interrupted by illness; moving countries or family problems; education disrupted by high teacher turnover or industrial action; and domestic responsibilities at home affecting school work. Most students qualified on the basis of these criteria because they had attended local schools disrupted by industrial action. The first criteria (no tradition of higher education) was felt to be crucial by staff. The policy was aimed at students who might be the first of their families to go to university. Providing some of the cultural and social capital for such students was a central aim of the course. This was considered critical help for students - to decode the complex system of A levels and applying to higher education which, for a variety of reasons was not received at home.

Once accepted on the course, students' timetables consisted of 2 A level courses and most took extra GCSEs. The two extra support sessions of an hour and 15 minutes each week were used primarily to support the work done in A level and GCSE lessons. One of these sessions was double staffed by either a Humanities, an English or careers teacher. These support sessions enabled students to access individual help with work but

also encouraged them to develop both independent and collaborative study skills. Teachers were very keen to encourage students to exploit common content in their different A levels –

*There was an idea that within the kind of subjects that students studied that often there were overlaps and there were areas where it was absolutely valuable to have a sense of the way one subject area related to another subject area like Sociology to Economics .....so there was an issue about helping students understand what they were dealing with in a deeper way by giving them access to the connections between different A levels or to more generic issues within A levels.*

(Interview: Jenny Dean, April, 1997)

The formal programme of study support was negotiated with the student group as a whole. This consisted of helping students to develop better research methods, organisation of study skills and enabling them to build up their confidence in contributing to class discussion.

On successful completion of this course and with two A level subjects at grade E or above, students were assured of a place on a degree course in the two polytechnics which were part of the scheme. In 1990 the quota system of places allocated by the polytechnics was replaced by a more open application system and another polytechnic, Southsea was added to the scheme to offer more choice.

Once the links with polytechnics were established the course began with the first set of students recruited for September 1988. The number was determined by the normal size of a tutor group and the demand remained fairly constant so no further selection procedures other than the criteria outlined above were needed. Having said that, the specified criteria were not always adhered to as is evident in the next chapter.

Applying to higher education was difficult for most HELC students without support from parents who understood the system. Reay (1998) describes the pitfalls for working class students making choices about higher education-

*...they are having to negotiate increasingly complex, differentiated educational fields in which they have widely disparate access to the range of resources necessary to de-code the field.*

(Reay, 1998: 12)

Help with such negotiation was on offer on the HELC where careers staff were available to answer questions and give advice about progression routes. Help with applications and



mock higher education interviews was provided. Students attended lectures at Northside University to provide a taste of higher education. As a national expert, John Barton's knowledge of the institutions of higher education and progression routes was impressive. He had a very positive relationship with students -

*I think basically we are trying to help them realise what is possible for them and help them to aspire higher. That always seems to me to be the ethos of the place. Together with the fact that we offer as much encouragement and support along the way as we can; which is not the characteristic of other educational institutions I've worked in.*

(Interview: John Barton, April, 1997)

So the HELC was designed to provide students with the cultural and social capital necessary to compete and succeed at A levels and progress onto higher education.

## **6.8 The College Culture**

The Humanities and careers staff also felt that the HELC was very much a product of the ethos and philosophy of the college. This is spelt out formally in the College's prospectus in three of the aims -

- To increase the numbers and range of young people involved in full-time education beyond the age of sixteen.
- To provide all young people in the 16-19 age group with appropriate educational courses in an adult and pleasant environment, enabling staff and students to work together.
- To demonstrate equality of personal value and opportunities, irrespective of class, sex race or previous level of educational achievement. Actively to combat racist or sexist behaviour or practices.

(Northside Sixth Form College Prospectus, 1988)

Such aims had to be translated into action. Angela Downside describes the combination of factors that contributed to an ethos in which new courses like HELC could be set up and students could be supported to succeed -

*There was a whole combination of very committed staff who had high expectations, a high level of teacher motivation and the structure was very good at both retaining that and moving people on and developing new ideas and so when someone came up with the idea of the Poly Link Course, it was enthusiastically received and time and energy were put into it, backed up by senior management. The whole sort of environment was very positive for*

*teachers. I think that this meant that teachers had a good approach to students and really worked hard to create a good atmosphere where students felt safe; they felt that they could achieve, and get the results and that they could progress onto Higher Education.*

(Interview: Angela Downside, April, 1997)

This environment relates back to the fact that the first Director had been able to set the place up from scratch and received generous funding from the ILEA and support from influential parents in the borough. Jenny Dean describes the sort of teachers and their ways of working -

*The College was a very peculiar and unusual place in terms of the kind of staff that had been recruited. They seemed to have an enormous amount of autonomy in terms of the way that they approached their work and most people had other things in their lives that were not part of their work as teachers. Like they were writers or they were involved in mountain climbing or some international organisation. They all had quite interesting lives apart from being teachers and I think that was a very important part of their ability to be very good teachers because they weren't completely dependent on the way the wind blew in relation to teaching. They had their own confidence and autonomy and that made enormous difference to their ability to develop courses there and to the way they worked ...you know people collaborated and they discussed things not because they had to but because they wanted to. There was a kind of real sense of optimism and that people were able to make things happen, do things, change things.*

(Interview: Jenny Dean, April, 1997)

Teachers also taught a range of courses and this led to cross-fertilisation with new ways of working in vocational courses informing academic courses. So most staff had contact with students who had under-achieved in local schools and come to the College with no qualifications –

*We all knew students who had under-achieved at school who showed that they had the potential if they were given the support and encouragement, it wasn't unknown for a student to move from a pre-vocational course right through GCSEs and into A levels. It was giving them the fresh start and the support really.*

(Interview: Rosalind Burns, February, 1997)

It was also considered quite 'normal' for such students to consider higher education as an option. The comprehensive nature of the place made it appear 'cool' for everyone to go onto higher education and the social class mix helped to create this culture-

*there was a core of middle class students for whom it was an expectation, and*

*that all sort of rubbed off on everyone else. And that all added to the positive atmosphere from the institution. They got a lot of support from tutors and ourselves in careers. I think definitely it would make a difference coming to a place like this.*

(Interview: John Barton, April, 1997)

The careers team - three full time teachers, who operated from a permanent base in the College, provided a very high quality service on progression to higher education.

The ethos of NSFC provided a fertile space for policy developments like the HELC. Teachers also described ways in which the course influenced the college so it was a two-way flow of influence. It changed the perception that A levels are 'not just for clever kids from middle class homes' as Angela Downside describes-

*It made people prepared to look at students more flexibly, that they didn't need to have the standard level of GCSE results to go onto A level. It also resulted in interesting debates and discussions about the nature of learning in education.*

(Interview: Angela Downside, April, 1997)

This two way flow of influence resulted in learning support workshops being made available for all students. A mentor course using local black professionals was set up to provide role models for black students. A *Connect* scheme which made links with a wide range of institutions of higher education was established for all students to take advantage of. Staff involved in the HELC were asked to contribute articles in journals produced in further and higher education to disseminate the good practice of the College (Morris, 1992). NSFC was an exciting place to be a member of staff at this time. One reason for this was that national and local agendas came together to produce opportunities for small policy initiatives to be developed by teachers. This was prior to legislation introducing new funding arrangements for colleges, which appear to have seriously restricted teachers' room for manoeuvre in developing potentially counter-hegemonic policies.

## **6.9 Voices and Silences of Policy Production**

Meanings are constructed through explicit or more often implicit contrast; a positive rests upon the negative of something antithetical. The normal, worthy student and the acceptable processes of admission are legitimised by reference to the abnormal, the unworthy, the unacceptable. The silences are as important as what is said; by implication the abnormal can be derided or ridiculed.

(Williams, 1997: 26)

In this context of text production there were a number of unspoken assumptions about this course and these constitute the silences of text production. Firstly, there was a silence in the lack of specific articulation of what was meant by 'that kind of student' that the HELC aimed to recruit. The phrase was a surrogate for local, working class and ethnic minority. Though criteria were used for recruitment, these were tacit. The motive for keeping them implicit was that they could be used as flexibly as possible by staff in recruiting students onto the course.

Secondly, the culture of achievement at NSFC resulted in an assumption that higher education was a 'good thing' for every one and this perhaps led to alternatives to higher education being ignored. Mary Benton considers this –

*There was a culture of getting students into university and a lot of pressure to get as many in as possible. I think there was less emphasis on helping students to explore other potential routes which in some cases may have done students a disservice. It's difficult to evaluate but we did put more energy into getting students into university and polytechnics rather than looking at any other possible professions. We were pressurised into actually boosting the numbers going into higher education because that was seen as a real success criteria for the organisation. I can remember individual students with whom I used to talk who didn't want that... they were put under too much pressure.*

(Interview: Mary Benton, June, 1997)

This rested upon an assumption that doing a degree in higher education was a 'good thing' for everyone and this was not really questioned or made problematic. There was pressure in the institution to succeed and the criteria for this were A level grades, league tables and the number of university entrants. This may have led teachers to 'over access' their students by providing too much support. The HELC was student-centred and promoted collaborative ways of working and yet it was preparation for higher education with a competitive and individualistic culture. Parry describes this contradiction in access courses –

What is offered is a non-traditional pathway to a traditional provision; and a student centred preparation for a subject centred experience.

(Parry, 1986:49)

The second silence of text production was that both staff and students were uneasy with using the term 'disadvantaged,' to describe students. It was necessary to target students as 'different' in order to make claims for extra resources but in doing so such

labelling might have led to further disadvantaging them.

This is what Fraser (1997) has called a recognition-redistribution dilemma: the sort of young men and women recruited to the HELC were mainly working class and from ethnic minorities. In terms of their cultural identities their positioning was complex. They belonged to what Fraser calls 'bivalent collectivities' suffering injustices which were both the result of socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition. The first, calls for redistributive remedies and the second, for recognition remedies but these cannot be easily pursued simultaneously. Such dilemmas affect policies like the HELC that call for affirmative action to counter former inequities of provision without altering the underlying generative framework. I use two events from the course to illustrate this dilemma. Firstly an article in a local newspaper and secondly a conversation between a tutor and a HELC student. An article about the first cohort of students on the Polytechnic Link Course had appeared in the local paper -

#### **Helping Hand to a Top College Place**

A dozen students at Northside Sixth Form College are capitalising on a hot line to further education. The talented twelve have been earmarked by the College for extra weekly classes to prepare for university or polytechnic life. All the students are guaranteed a place at Northside or Oakfield polytechnics if they attend regularly. The students chosen were hampered by some social or educational disadvantage, explained tutor Alison Kirton. We felt they were capable of performing well in Higher Education provided they received support and encouragement." "The classes have been a big practical help," said one student. Her education was disrupted by teachers' strikes at her Northside school and intermittent spells in hospital. She had not really considered university or polytechnic - until starting the links course. "It has given me the chance to further my educational career," she said. "I am going for B grades in my Politics and Media Studies A levels and hope to go to University.

( Northside Newspaper, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1989)

The students whose photograph appeared with the article and whose names were named were very angry with their tutor for describing them as 'hampered by some social or educational disadvantage'. They found this insulting as they felt it seemed to reflect on them as individuals and their families, rather than focussing on the system which had disadvantaged them - even though the article did just that. However, while they wished to have the inequities which partly accounted for their under-achievement taken into account, signaling this in public made them feel devalued and disparaged. So an article

aimed at celebrating their achievement and the course had the opposite effect. This illustrates the paradoxical nature of such policies: the recognition-redistribution dilemma described by Fraser (1997).

Another example of this dilemma is an argument Rosalind Burns had with a HELC student. In her application to higher education she wanted to be described in the same terms as other students and did not want details of her 'disadvantage' included-

*I mean we can describe it and talk about value added and distance travelled and all the rest of it but it is tricky for students, particularly when they have a range of other people that they know in their teaching groups who are not in the same situation, and why should everyone know about their home backgrounds and why should everyone know that they have just come from Nigeria or whatever it is we want to write about... you do have to choose your words extremely carefully. It is not just them that are sensitive about it .. it is other people. It is a tricky issue.*

(Interview: Rosalind Burns, February, 1997)

This highlights a very real problem not just for the language used but for access policies, which target 'disadvantaged' students. Students were in a contradictory position. They simultaneously wanted to be regarded as the same as other students but also for their difference to be recognised. Recognising their 'difference' and needs, as well as providing some kind of positive discrimination in terms of resources, may mean that the policy in fact disadvantages them further. This is particularly true if the redistribution of resources is not sufficient to make up for former educational and social disadvantage. Further failure can then be blamed on the student who had extra resources but still failed (Fraser, 1997).

Another silence was that scarce resources were being used in the Humanities department and some staff in the college from other departments thought that the students were not 'truly disadvantaged' and that the money was 'subsidising the flakey' (field notes, 1997) and therefore wasted. This became an issue in the college when the Languages Department inspired by the success of the HELC started a similar courses for Languages students. It only lasted two years because the Languages teachers felt that the students they recruited were not worth the extra resources. Students did not attend, were not really committed and were not really disadvantaged. Finally there were the resentful voices of other teachers in the local borough. This was based on the generous level of resourcing NSFC attracted compared to other institutions. Jenny Dean describes this –

*Northside College was known locally as 'the royal route' ...they meant it was the easy way, that once you were in there you were kind of on your way, on the up! Whereas if you went to Bridge College, the local FE College, it wasn't the same situation. The FE teachers characterised NSFC as white, middle class and elitist and of course when you looked at the classroom it didn't reflect what they had said in the sense that you would have black students ... I think there were comprehensive classes even in the A level groups but it did vary between different A level subjects depending on their selection criteria ... the degree of comprehensiveness... but I think they were pretty well balanced classes. So to me it was always a truly comprehensive institution in the mix of students. But I really do take the point of the lecturers at Bridge College because I used to think when you went in there how poor the building was and you really had a sense of lack of resourcing and I did feel that our students were not what you would capture if you kind of put a net around a group on the road outside ...we had got students who were self recruited who had come from all over London and often had been in the public school system or had famous parents ... you were getting a special group of students but I think it was a truly comprehensive group as well.*

*(Interview: Jenny Dean, April, 1997)*

#### **6.10 The Fate of the Text**

In the following two chapters of this thesis the HELC as a policy will be 'read' through one cohort of students. How the policy was creatively acted upon, read in a variety of settings, filtered and (multi) authored by them will be outlined. Here the task that remains is to tell the story of the fate of the policy in the words of those who initiated it.

The period between 1988 and 1995 saw many changes in the different contexts of the policy cycle. Legislative changes in the context of influence saw the incorporation of further education and sixth form colleges taken out of the control of Local Education Authorities. New stringent funding arrangements and controls were implemented through the Further Education Funding Council. Higher education saw the formal end of a binary system, massive expansion and new funding arrangements. These changes have been dealt with in Chapter Four. There were also radical changes in provision at the local level which have been highlighted in Table 1. These changes had great influence on the ability of staff at NSFC to sustain a policy like the HELC. A number of themes emerged from the data from tutors and careers teacher about the effects of such changes. The first of these was the effects of changes in funding-

*Well basically it stopped operating when we had to make cuts in learning support provision and every department had to cut this support by a certain*

*percentage and Humanities was seen to have more support than other departments and the HELC took up a lot of the support time because it was a session a week for two groups. I think there's basically a simple economic reason why it didn't continue. The effect of incorporation on the college has meant that we've sliced so many things and the ethos of the college has been attacked and its part of a wider context this climate of contraction really.*

(Interview: Angela Downside, April, 1997)

Other staff also emphasised the effects of the Further Education Funding Council's new funding mechanism with courses organised as units of resource and given accreditation. The norm for this was three A levels and it involved a great deal of extra paper work to make a case for extra support. Students only doing two A levels would not be funded. This was the final blow to the HELC whose extra resources had been slowly whittled away. These changes also required staff to teach more, with fewer resources, and therefore a lot of the old creativity, forward thinking and commitment began to disappear. However Angela Downside also felt that these changes had some positive effects-

*The impact on students has been that teachers are working harder; they've got less time to spend with students and I think that effects the kind of ethos... the open door 'come and see me whenever you want' policy. But maybe we've become slightly more efficient; we've begun to think well what is necessary, maybe it has forced us to reflect on methods and how we should approach both students and teaching and learning. It's not necessarily all bad, but if you talk to most people at the College they think it is fairly negative.*

(Interview: Angela Downside, April, 1997)

The second was the changes in higher education in 1992. Staff at the NSFC outlined how the massive expansion in higher education after 1992 meant that special links like the HELC were no longer necessary-

*What happened with higher education was that HE basically opened its doors because it needed all the students it could get for several years, so instead of having to knock at the doors and make special arrangements.... So they stopped offering us any special deals, but we continued to get more and more students into university.*

(Interview: Angela Downside, April, 1997)

However there was a feeling that, despite increasing access to higher education, non-traditional students still needed the learning support, or needed it more than ever. They needed to acquire skills to help them to survive and flourish in higher education which had expanded without a parallel expansion in resources -



AK: *So you think it is no longer necessary?*

JW: *The links aren't necessary but identifying students who should only be doing two A levels and giving them support is more needed now, than when you did it.*

(Interview: Joy White, May, 1997)

Joy White went on to explain that this was because she felt the quality of students had changed. She also claimed that the changes in higher education appeared to have resulted in larger teaching groups and less individual support for students. This was a result of new funding arrangements putting pressure on staff and resources. This situation made access courses even more necessary.

### 6.11 "Thatcher's Children"?

Two members of staff felt very strongly that there had been a noticeable change in student attitudes and dispositions since the course was set up in 1988. In 1997 Joy White argued that the course would not work now because the quality of students recruited had changed. She claimed that the students coming to the college in the mid 1990s were "Thatcher's Children" with the attitude that individualism rules -

JW: *I think students now as individuals are .. they would not come now. I don't think that there is that commitment. They want to be spoon - fed but only in their lesson time. Their time keeping, their punctuality is dreadful.*

AK: *It's always been bad.*

JW: *No it's much worse now, homework, everything is much more of a struggle.*

AK: *Is there more pressure for them to work to support themselves?*

JW: *Yes, that's the other thing most of them work a lot of hours a week and at weekends. This goes back to the kind of materialist thing...some of them need to work, and some of them just want clothes and to party ... which is, you know fine, but not if it is interfering with their studies. Alison, if you taught here now, you wouldn't know it ...it's not the same, you wouldn't know it was the same place.*

(Interview: Joy White, May, 1997)

John Barton also agreed with Joy White that students were more individualistic with

more cynicism and fatalism. They can be accused of 'golden ageism', of harking back to times when they assume the working conditions and the quality of the students were much better. However, all the staff interviewed felt that the college had changed and pointed to objective factors, like much larger class size, with A level groups of 22, whereas they had been 12 in the 1980s. They cited much heavier teaching loads and the fact that teachers no longer taught across a range of different courses, as evidence of their worsening conditions and quality of work.

Finally, a related and interesting issues to arise from the data was that staff, particularly John Barton felt that policies like the HELC were hard to sustain as the institution and staff changed -

*I've got an idea that things go in cycles a bit though, in that I think an institution can become a mature institution and then grow a bit old and faded. I seriously think that. Yeh , I think that's the case here, together with all the additional pressures of funding, which I think are causing a lot of people to chuck in the towel in different ways, like either to go part-time ..or get another job or not to be quite so proactive as they used to be. So maybe there is a sort of accumulated fatigue. That sounds dramatic, you know what I mean though?*

(Interview: John Barton, April, 1997)

This issue of sustainability indicates that policies which start out as writerly can become more and more readerly as the conditions in which they originally flourished change. In the 1980s there was space and resources for teachers to be creative and innovative. Such innovation was much harder to sustain in the mid 1990s with much tighter funding restrictions.

## **6.12 Conclusion**

This chapter has focussed on the teachers' story in the development of a policy aimed at providing access to higher education for 'disadvantaged' students from the local borough. While the chapter is an account of the context of local text production it illustrates how all the contexts in the policy cycle overlap and interact. However, it is useful to separate them for analytical purposes and in order to have a starting point. The aims and motives, or the policy intentions of those involved in the policy formulation have been outlined as well as the borough and college contexts in which these developments took place. The

following two chapters unpack the ways in which the policy was played out in practice. Did students share the teachers' initial excitement and enthusiasm for the HELC? What was the relationship of policy intentions of the teachers as the official architects of the scheme to the actual policy effects or outcomes? Chapter Seven traces the policy-in-practice through the different responses of one cohort of students.

## Chapter Seven

### The context of practice: 'receivers' 'rejecters' and 'recreators'

#### 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the factors influencing local text production. It told the teachers' story by outlining their motives and aims in developing the HELC. The following two chapters tell the students' stories and thus reveal the relationship between the policy intentions of the teachers and policy effects on the ground. The focus of both chapters is how the HELC as a policy was received, interpreted and recreated by one group of students, the third cohort of the course. Chapter 8 looks at the context of outcomes and continues to track the different responses of students to higher and further education and employment. This chapter focuses on student responses to 'policy-in-use'. It investigates the context of practice, the next stage in the policy cycle of the HELC. Bowe et al (1992) describe this context –

Policies then are textual interventions but they also carry with them material constraints and possibilities. The responses to these texts have 'real' consequences. These consequences are experienced within the third main context, the context of practice, the arena of practice to which policy refers, to which it is addressed. The key point is that policy is not simply received and implemented within this arena rather it is subject to interpretation and then 'recreated'.

(Bowe et al, 1992: 21-22)

The chapter has eleven sub-sections. The first two introduce the characters in this research, twelve students who were the third cohort of the scheme, and discuss issues arising from their complex identities. The third section uses responses to the policy intentions to structure the remainder of the chapter. It provides definitions of categories of students had as 'receivers,' 'rejecters' and 'recreators' and it outlines the basis on which students were allocated to these. The different responses to both the learning support and the links with higher education institutions are introduced. The following six sections then describe and discuss these various responses. The final section considers the extent to which these students made the policy 'their own' and the ways in which they were constrained. Fraser's (1997) work is used to interrogate tensions within the policy that became apparent in the context of practice including why some students felt

stigmatised by being on the course.

## 7.2 Introducing the characters

It is difficult to do justice to the complexity of the lives and individual identities of the young people in this cohort without providing a great deal of detail, so outline data are provided below in Table 2. A short social and educational biography of each student is included in Appendix 7. Each biography tells the story of why students chose the college and the course. It includes their interpretation of the factors that explained their 'under-achievement' at secondary school. In order to construct these biographies I drew on interviews with teachers, students, and eight parents, all mothers, as well as relevant documents such as school reports and university application forms. I also drew on my own insider knowledge as their teacher and tutor. Students were asked to define themselves in terms of social class, gender, ethnicity, religion and some described their political orientation.

**TABLE 2: A PROFILE OF THE 1990-1992 COHORT OF THE HELC**

Name	Gender	Parental occupations (as described by the students)	Ethnicity (Self-described)	Religion
Ade	F	Father-Businessman (4)HE Mother - Cook and night nurse (3)	Black African	Pentecostal Christian
Danny	M	Father - Psychiatric nurse (2)HE Mother - long term unemployed nurse (8)	Black British	None
Denise	F	Father - Post room worker ( 7) Mother -Housewife (7)	Black British	Worldwide Church of God
Eleni	F	Father- Insurance agent (4) Mother - Secretary / interpreter (3)	Greek British	None
Kit	F	Father - Unemployed electrician (8) Mother - unemployed Machinist (8)	Afro-Caribbean.	Seventh Day Adventist
Lisa	F	Father - Van driver (6) HE Mother - FE Lecturer(2) HE	White British	None
Lola	F	Father - Minicab Business (4) Mother - Lift Maintenance (6)	Black African	Seventh Day Adventist
Mark	M	Father - Shop owner (4)HE Mother - Therapist(2)	Anglo-French	None
Max	M	Grandmother -Retired seamstress(6)	Black British	Christian
Seth	M	Father -Vet ( in Sierra Leone ) (1)HE Mother - Health visitor (2) HE	Black African	Seventh Day Adventist
Tim	M	Father - Senior Civil Servant(1) HE Mother - Registrar in HE (1) HE	Black British	None
Zelda	F	Mother -Primary teacher. (2) HE	Black British	'Mildly' religious

<sup>1</sup>Social class categories

### 7.3 Were they truly disadvantaged?

There were twelve students who enrolled as the 1990 cohort of the HELC, five young men and seven young women. The chart above shows how students described their parents' occupations. It shows that Danny, Zelda, Seth, Tim, Lisa and Mark had professional parents. Lola and Ade's fathers owned small businesses and had intermediate and working class wives respectively. Eleni's parents were intermediate class. Only three students, Denise, Max, and Kit were unambiguously working class using the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) occupational categories. Danny, came from a cross class family and lived with his working class mother. This updated occupational classification with tight descriptions and new categories is welcomed. However there are still questions about whether a single criterion such as occupational status can capture the full significance of social class. As this cohort will demonstrate the combination of ethnicity and gender, cultural identifications and educational and social experiences indicate complex positionings.

The social class backgrounds of the cohort raise important questions. Was this yet another policy, though on a very different scale, like the assisted places scheme (Edwards et al, 1989) aimed at 'disadvantaged' pupils but hijacked by the middle class? If we consider the criteria used for judging social and educational disadvantage outlined in Chapter 6 the most crucial for the teachers was that students had no tradition of higher education in their families. Seven out of twelve students had parents who had completed higher education courses though most were the first of their generation to do so. This might lead us to question whether all of these students should have been the recipients of a policy designed to counter social and educational disadvantage. However, if the complex interactions of students' social and educational experiences, gender and ethnicity as well as social class are considered, patterns of disadvantage emerge. A closer look at some of the students' backgrounds serves to illustrate this. For example Seth and Zelda's mothers, both black, were lone parents. They were the first in their families to attend higher education. Neither student was comfortable with the label "middle class" because of the struggle they had observed in their mothers' experience of upward social mobility.

Another example was Tim. He was an adopted child. He described himself as

black British and his parents were white, British and middle class. He refused to let his parents have any formal contact at all with the college. He would not allow them to attend parents' evenings. His complex ethnic and social class background was the source of some conflict for him in terms of how he wanted teachers and other students to regard him. He refused to be drawn out about this in the interviews.

Lisa was a single mother at seventeen. She is yet another example of this complexity of social and educational background. She worked part-time at a local community centre to support her daughter and herself through college and higher education. Her child was 'mixed race'. She got little financial and emotional support from the father. Her mother describes her response to school –

*By the time she was fourteen she was in a state of rebellion. Things at school went from bad to worse. She started doing bits of truanting. She preferred to go out, she had a kind of thing about some girls being middle class and kind of posh and she didn't want to be part of that group. She didn't want to be pretentious, ... she wanted to be part of black street culture and in street culture it wasn't cool to achieve in school. So there was that kind of conflict. And in the end when she did her GCSEs she got minimal qualifications.*

(Interview: Lisa's mother, April, 1993)

So despite the fact that Lisa had a middle-class mother she identified strongly with the black, working class culture of her school. School culture was more influential than that of the home. Her mother had wanted to remove her from the school but was not sure that any of the alternatives available would be better. She felt that the school had very low expectations of pupils.

These details of the educational and social backgrounds of Seth, Zelda, Tim and Lisa illustrate that they were not straightforward middle class A level students. The professional parents of the cohort were 'new middle class' who were Labour voting and employed in the public sector, except for Mark's parents. They all chose to send their children to state comprehensives in Northside or surrounding boroughs (with the exception of Seth who had attended a private Seventh Day Adventist school until he was thirteen). They were very critical of the poor quality of secondary education their children had received. In particular, it was felt that the teachers' industrial action had adversely affected their children's academic achievement. In the mid to late 1980s there were disputes causing strike action over teachers' pay, school amalgamations and the abolition

of the ILEA. Tim's mother sums up how some parents felt -

*AK: But did you visit the school a lot?*

*TM: Oh Yeah... my husband was chair of the School Association, for three or four years. We always went to every parents evening and all that fund raising stuff... we were very supportive. When we got to all that industrial action, particularly when we got to the point where schools were effectively ... the kids were losing two weeks teaching and the staff were losing half a days pay, I just gave up visiting. I still feel angry at the way that group of staff let down whole generations of inner city kids.*

(Interview: Tim's mother, 1993)

She indicated the discontent she felt about the quality of teaching at secondary school but like Lisa's mother felt there was no real choice. Moving schools was not an option. However, she like all the other parents interviewed, had nothing but praise for the teaching at NSFC and how it had provided the means for their children to improve their GCSEs and change their learner identities. They also appreciated the support the HELC gave students, though they indicated that their children had not provided them with much detail of the course.

Nine out of the twelve students were 'black' and three 'white', describing their ethnicity in various ways. Only Ade was actually born in Nigeria but she, Seth and Lola described themselves ethnically, as "Black African". Most of the other black students were happy with the term Black British except Kit who rejected the term in favour of Afro Caribbean because she felt - 'we're not accepted here as Black British - really I don't think so - unless you are a good sports person' Interview: Kitt, April, 1992. Lisa described herself as white British, Mark as Anglo-French and Eleni as Greek British.

Ade, Kit, Lola, Denise and Seth were Evangelical Christians. They describe the support their churches gave them. This was a source of social and cultural capital, though in another currency (Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. and Bowe, R.1994). Seth's mother explained how important religion is -

*The church is a community.... it plays an important role in the lives of black people... its more than just a black place of worship... it provides a network of support ... help with childcare for example.*

(Interview: Seth's mother, 1992)

The church network had provided her with the information that NSFC was a good place for Seth to do his A levels, such useful knowledge enabling her to 'play the



system'. It is interesting that religion featured so significantly in the lives of these five students. They described how their religion provided extra support, compensating in a small way for their lack of cultural capital and positioning them as powerful in at least one aspect of their lives. The use of prayer when the 'going got hard' was mentioned by both Ade and Lola. Kit mentions the philosophy of 'self-help' and 'bettering yourself' through education as a powerful strand in her religion. Denise's mother describes the influence that 'being religious' had on her daughter's life style making it conducive to academic study. It also promoted a positive orientation to the pursuit of educational qualifications. However such an orientation had not prevented both Lola and Kit from serious under-achievement at secondary school.

The one characteristic that all the students in this cohort have in common is attending inner city comprehensives. They all felt they shared a working class culture at school, where it was considered 'uncool' to work hard and achieve academically. Pupils who did so were unpopular. Their schools were also disrupted by strikes, amalgamations and high teacher turnover. All the students, except Seth, felt they had not achieved their potential at school. As shown in Table 3, only five students had the four GCSEs needed to enrol on A level courses at NSFC and even these five felt that they would require extra support to succeed.

**TABLE 3: GCSE QUALIFICATIONS GAINED AT SECONDARY SCHOOL AND NSFC**

Name	GCSEs at School	GCSEs at Northside
Ade	Drama C History C Media St C Science C Sociology C	English B Maths C
Danny	Commerce C Design C English C History C Science C	Maths C
Denise	Child Dev. C Drama C English Lang. C English Lit. C	Maths C
Eleni	Art & Design C CDT. B	English C Media St.C Photography B
Kit	No GCSE passes at A - C	Com St C Maths C Media St. B Theatre Arts A
Lisa	Art & Design C Drama B	English B
Lola	Drama A	Com.St B English B Psychology C
Mark	No GCSE passes at A - C	English C Law C Media C
Max	English Lit. C Maths C	Law B Psychology B
Seth	Art & Design A Drama C English Lit.C English Lang. C History C	Maths. C
Tim	English Lang. C English Lit. C Geog. C	Law B Maths C Media St. B
Zelda	CDT C English Lang C Latin C Spanish C	Maths C

While it is true that students possessed different amounts of cultural capital, their complex combinations of social class, ethnicity and gender, as well as their social and educational biographies, indicate that they were not 'traditional' A level students. They can therefore be seen as legitimate intended targets of a policy to counter social and educational disadvantage.

#### **7.4 The HELC: ‘Receivers’ ‘Rejecters’ and ‘Recreators’**

Trying to make sense of the various ways in which this small and heterogeneous cohort of students made this policy, in this context of practice, ‘their own’ is something of a challenge. Their responses to the policy-in-practice were complex. It is impossible to present the minutiae of their experiences. Instead three categories will be used offering inter-related points about how the policy was received, rejected and recreated, illustrated from the data collected.

##### ***‘Receivers’***

These students had a positive orientation to both the learning support and links with higher education. They recognised that the course met their learning support needs resulting from factors in their social and educational backgrounds. They attended the HELC sessions regularly making good use of both the teacher support and collaboration with other students. They applied to the link institutions in order to have ‘insurance offers’. Though they were critical of certain aspects of the HELC this was outweighed by what they perceived as the benefits. They indicated that they would not have got into higher education without the extra support the course provided.

##### ***‘Rejecters’***

The ‘rejecters’ had a mainly negative orientation to the learning support. After attending well in the early days of the course their attendance and commitment declined. This was due mainly to considering other priorities in their lives more important. On the whole they rejected the advice and learning support on offer in the course. The opportunity to work collaboratively with other students was rarely taken up. Prioritising other activities resulted in poor A level results and therefore they either rejected the links with higher education or were not in a position to make use of them.

##### ***‘Recreators’***

While all the students selectively appropriated the parts of the course that met their needs and rejected other parts, to some extent, the ‘recreators’ did this most clearly. There was some positive orientation to the learning support especially for providing emotional support and useful knowledge not available in the home. The higher education links were also strongly recreated by students. For one student this was to an alternative course in

further education. For the others the offers of degrees in Humanities and Social Science were recreated in favour of Media or Communication Studies, or English. This is described as recreation rather than rejection because there was some evidence that being on the HELC had helped them to get places at universities that were not part of the HELC.

As with all categorisation, students' experiences do not fit perfectly into these three categories. Mac an Ghaill (1994) indicates the limitations of using typologies-

They often serve to mask the complex meanings that are reductively represented in the selected types ... these are not fixed unitary categories.

(Mac an Ghaill, 1994:54)

He recommends the use of typologies as a heuristic device to indicate a range of possible responses. Most students had elements of all three responses in differing degrees at different times. A judgement was made on the basis of their overall response in order to make some analytical statements about how the HELC was re-made by this cohort. Responses to the learning support were different from the way in which the higher education options on offer were re-written. These responses reveal that some parts of the text or policy offered more opportunities for interpretation and recreation. In order to do this it is necessary to explain the learning support and the links with higher education. This will be followed by an analysis of how the 'receivers' 'rejecters' and 'recreators' responded to the learning support and higher education options.

### **7.5 Policy intentions: Learning support and links with higher education**

As discussed in the previous chapter, students on the HELC were provided with two and a half hours of extra support per week, divided into two sessions on Tuesday evening and Friday morning. These sessions provided students with learning support for A level and GCSE homework. The sessions were double staffed with Humanities teachers, one of whom was the course tutor.

Another aim was for students to acquire study skills. The pedagogy of the support sessions was very student-centred. Students were encouraged to work in small groups to plan essays and homework, to discuss ideas and to share worries and concerns. The teachers moved around these groups giving help and subject support. John Barton,

the careers teacher introduced in Chapter 6, also attended some of these sessions. He provided advice and information on higher education progression at crucial points in the two years.

A second policy intention was to enable access to degree courses in the Humanities and Social Science Departments at three Polytechnics through a flexible agreement with admissions tutors. The institutions involved were the Polytechnic of Oakfields, offering places on the BA in Social Science with three options, Law, Political Economy and Social Policy; the Polytechnic of Northside offering places in Humanities, Social Science and Law and the Polytechnic of Southsea offering places on a modular Humanities degree course.

The ways in which students responded to these two policy intentions is used as a basis for allocating them to the categories of 'receiver' 'rejecter' and 'recreator'. Such responses will be discussed in full in the next three sections.

## **7.6 'Receivers': Ade, Lisa and Tim**

These three students can be interpreted as having the most positive orientation to the HELC. They accepted relatively uncritically, compared to other students, that the course aims and content met their needs. Reference to their biographies is necessary in order to contextualise their response. Table 4 provides an overview of the biographies of each of these students.

Ade's education had been interrupted when the family moved from Nigeria to London. She attended a local comprehensive and found it difficult to adapt to a system that was much less disciplinarian. She had applied for the HELC because she felt she needed the learning support, especially help with her written and spoken English. She had a very conflictual relationship with her mother causing her to leave home during her A level course. Her mother, a nurse who worked at night and as a caterer by day was a lone parent with five children. As a result Ade had to play proxy mother to her younger sisters. Her mother, though supportive of Ade's plan to go onto higher education, had no understanding of the level of commitment needed to succeed at A level. She made demands on Ade to help with domestic work and childcare.

**TABLE 4: 'RECEIVERS' GCSE RESULTS AND CRITERIA FOR SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

receivers	GCSEs at school	GCSEs at NSFC	Criteria for social and educational disadvantage	Response to the HELC
<b>Ade (working class)</b> Black African	5 GCSEs Local comp	2 GCSEs	Education disrupted by moving from Nigeria to UK. English not first language. Conflictual relationship with mother. Heavy domestic commitments. Schooling in UK disrupted by strikes.	Positive response to the HELC. Recognition that it met her needs for support especially with her English. Set time for work. Collaboration with other students welcomed.
<b>Lisa (middle class)</b> White British	2GCSEs Local comp	1 GCSE	Lone mother at 17. Under-achievement at school. Identification with working class culture at school. Schooling disrupted by strikes. Worked to support herself and her child.	Positive response to the course. Met her needs by helping her to organise her time. Provided support which she felt she had a right to.
<b>Tim (middle class)</b> Black British with white parents	3GCSEs comp in next borough	3 GCSEs	Under-achievement at school. Identification with working class culture at school. Schooling disrupted by strikes. Very supportive parents who were not allowed any contact with NSFC.	Positive response met his needs. Helped with his organisational skills. High expectations and structure. Good revision skills in the second year.

Lisa had begun A level courses at NSFC then discovered that she was pregnant. She returned after a year out having her baby and was advised very strongly to apply for the HELC. Lisa explains-

*It was at the interviews, the Course Guidance Workshop... three A levels and a small child its obvious that you were going to need the Poly Link.*

*(Interview: Lisa, May, 1992)*

Her strong relationship with her mother, especially the support and encouragement she received was kept hidden from her teachers. She actively and strategically promoted the image of being a lone struggling mother so that she could get the maximum support from NSFC. She explains –

*They think I need them to help and I do, I do need the help but if they know I've got an organised Mum they won't give me as much help.*

*(Interview: Lisa May, 1992)*

She was very committed to providing stability for her daughter. Interestingly, Lisa stressed that having Jade made her even more determined to succeed –

*There's no decision there. You don't think about how difficult it is going to be, you just do it. So having a child was never really a hindrance, because I grew up doing it. I always had her and it gave me the push, because I thought if I don't do something then I'm going to have no money and I'm going to have no life style.*

(Interview: Lisa, May, 1992)

This is clearly at odds with the pathologization of young single mothers as feckless and on the road to social exclusion. The fact that as a lone parent she chose to do three A levels when the norm for this course was two, illustrates her commitment and response to HELC. She describes her determination to succeed and to use all the help on offer.

Tim described how success in his GCSE year at NSFC after failing at school changed his learner identity. It made him feel capable of achieving academically. He felt the HELC provided him with someone who believed in him as well as a good structure with high expectations. He found it particularly useful in the second year when applications to university and examinations were a priority.

These three students had strong reasons for needing the academic support offered by the course. They also all had parents who had attended higher education, with Tim and Lisa's mothers working in education. For Tim and Lisa this combination of need, a positive orientation to education from their mothers and the necessary levels of cultural capital may partly explain the positive orientation to the course. Interestingly both refused to let their mothers have any contact with the college but for very different reasons. Ade did not have a supportive mother, mainly because of her own material conditions. Ade, however, recognised that the course could help her to achieve academically. Her cultural and religious background may explain her positive orientation to education.

Ade, Lisa and Tim were the most positive about the support sessions. Their experiences are used here to describe how the learning support intentions of the course were 'received' by them. These data indicate that being on the HELC provided them with a structure so that they could use their time effectively. This was particularly useful for Ade under pressure from her mother to do housework. It also meant that they had a set time for receiving help with their homework and had the 'right' to such help as Lisa

explained -

*It's very good ... a very good way of time management. If it wasn't there you wouldn't be doing anything probably. It is like a set amount of time where you're coming in to do something constructive instead of staying in bed and also the teachers are available and they are very helpful because usually you want to ask loads of questions either after or before lessons. It's really good to have a set time when you can bug them as much as you want and they are actually being paid to be bugged ...rather than just doing it in their lunch hour.*

(Interview: Lisa, May, 1992)

They also described other ways in which the support sessions helped them. For Ade it was, collaboration with other students, study support and time -

AK: *What about the group of students do you feel you help each other?*

Ade: *Yes we do. Most of the people in that group... in my Psychology and Sociology lessons and we all get on really well and there is a really friendly atmosphere. It has helped to develop some skills like writing essays and spelling and using a computer because we did this computer course in the first year. It also gives me extra time to do my homework because many evenings I have to do housework with my Mum. Also the teachers are there to give me help so I think it has been good.*

(Interview: Ade, May, 1992)

For Lisa it was both the time and an extra push in a supportive way -

*It's having a set time for the advice because usually I am so busy I'm running around all the time and everything gets done slapdash. It's sort of an extra push to do things correctly and to make sure I am on the right track. It's so easy to slip – you know once you have slipped a week. You've got this set time and they're not on your case but you've got that extra push that I actually need*

(Interview: Lisa, May, 1992)

For Tim it provided the organisational support he needed and he suggested that the support was useful in -

*Helping plan timed essays. I had timed essay practice which I really needed for the final exam. It also helped me to organise where to send off for my PCAS and UCCA forms and get that organised. It helps you with the work you have ... it doesn't pile on extra amounts of work.*

(Interview: Tim, July, 1992)



He felt that he had not used it to the full in the first year but when final exams came closer it really became useful.

Lisa was also critical of the stigmatising effects of the course. She diffused what she saw as labelling by using humour and irony. She referred to the HELC students in sessions as 'the deprived kids'. She was critical of the targeting necessary for the course and thought the learning support should be available to all students. Her response was to parody the teachers' unease in describing the social and educational disadvantage of students-

*And also when the teachers explain to others what the Link is ...it is really funny because they have to be careful with their choice of words ...they can't say it's all these deprived kids ... and they need an extra push so they've got to say it's people that need a bit of extra help because they've got problems at home ...you know they don't know what to say. That's funny.*

(Interview: Lisa, May, 1992)

So for Ade, Lisa and Tim there was a conjuncture of interests between the policy intentions of the teachers who initiated the HELC and the 'policy in practice'. Though they were not totally uncritical the support sessions were 'received' and used by them in the ways they were intended. This was to provide opportunities for collaboration, useful skills and learning support. Ade, Lisa and Tim had their own constraints in choosing where to study. All three applied to link institutions as well as other institutions as can be seen from Table 5.

**TABLE 5: 'RECEIVERS' A LEVEL RESULTS AND APPLYING TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

'receivers'	Predicted A level grades	Actual A level grades	Applications to university	University destination
Ade	Sociology E Psychology E	Sociology E Psychology D	Applied to 5 universities and 4 polytechnics to do Law including Northside a link institution. Rejected from all except Northside who made an offer of 2x E grades.	Northside Polytechnic to do Law
Lisa	Art C / D Politics C / D Sociology C/D	Art D Politics D Sociology C	Applied to 4 London polytechnics to do Social Work or Psycho-Social Studies including Northside a link institution.	Polytechnic of Eastside to do Psycho- Social Studies
Tim	Politics C Geography B/C	Politics E Geography E	Applied to 3 universities and 4 polytechnics to do Town Planning and Oakfield to do Law, a link institution.	Polytechnic of Westsea to do Town Planning.

Only Ade actually attended a link institution. She was delighted with the offer from Northside as she had applied to five Universities and four Polytechnics with rejections from all of them, except Northside. She describes how she felt –

*I've got a good offer from the Polytechnic of Northside for a Law degree. They have offered me two grade Es. I think it is a great achievement and I am glad I chose the HELC.*

(Interview: Ade, May, 1992)

The other rejections had been very painful for her. She attributed them to the poor predicted grades her teachers had given her on her application forms. She felt these grades were unfair and did not reflect her true abilities.

Tim used Oakfields Polytechnic's Social Science degree with the Law option as an 'insurance' offer. Unlike Ade he had had good offers from all the institutions he applied to, except Manchester which required two B grades. He was quite happy to venture outside London but only to cities or universities with black populations. This supports Modood's findings (1993) that black students tend to apply to universities in urban areas with large ethnic minority populations. He had had interviews at Newcastle and Westsea Polytechnic and the latter was his first choice because there was a sizeable

black population in the city unlike the former-

*A.K: What sort of things were you looking for? You said there were no black people at Newcastle – is that important to you?*

*Tim: Yes, because there's no-one I can relate to really. What I was looking for was what would it be like to stay here three years? Would I enjoy it? What were the facilities at this place like? What kind of people?*

*(Interview: Tim, July, 1992)*

The ethnicity, age and social class make up of its students and the ethos of the university were very important for him. For these reasons he accepted the offer from Westsea Polytechnic to do Town Planning. Lisa was the most constrained in her higher education options because of being a lone mother. She applied to three Polytechnics in London including Northside Polytechnic to do Social Work and Eastside Polytechnic to do Psycho-Social Studies. The latter was her first choice, which she described as a flexible combination of Sociology and Management. She received an offer of three E grades and accepted the place once she got her A level results. Lisa also expressed frustrations with other degree courses –

*Lisa: I chose this because all the other sociology courses are so set in their ways. Either you are a social worker or you are doing Health Policy and with this one you can choose modules and it was the only place offering Psycho-Social Studies.*

*A.K: But you haven't used any of the link institutions?*

*Lisa: Yes, because I did not want to do the courses. What I think has happened with the Polytechnic of Eastside is it's a complete dump and they've just got these progressive sort of lefty lecturers and they are trying to build up all these wonderful challenging things ...whereas every where else just seems so vocational ... that's the only thing with the HE Link - it would be nice if it was broader and not just Humanities. If that Link was available for every course.*

*(Interview: Lisa, May, 1992)*

Lisa's comments point to the problems of targeting students for special treatment and offering them specific degree courses. She indicates that having such access to all degree courses, with support, would provide a real choice for students.

Lisa and Tim got places at the universities of their choice. Only Ade's place was as a result of the links with universities as part of the HELC. However all these choices were constrained by material factors for Lisa, cultural factors for Tim and lack of

alternative offers for Ade. As 'receivers' of higher education options they had weighed up the possibilities and constraints of the courses available to them and on the basis of this made decisions that suited their needs.

### 7.7 'Rejecters': Mark, Max and Seth

In terms of the policy intentions these three male students appear to have benefited little from the HELC. They were not fully committed to its objectives because these conflicted with the other priorities in their lives. Such lack of commitment led to poor A level grades for all three students (see table 6). Mark and Max 'rejected' the opportunities to apply to university. Seth did apply but his A level results were not good enough for the Media Studies degree he wanted. In this respect Seth was a 'recreator' of the links with higher education. Such a response differed from the other two male students, Tim as a 'receiver' and Danny as a 'recreator'. Tim had the cultural capital in his background and a positive orientation to education. Danny was on his second attempt at A levels and therefore determined to succeed. These factors may account for the difference in response.

Student biographies provide some background to their response to this text. Mark had seriously under-achieved at school leaving with seven Grade Ds at GCSE. He was attracted to the HELC because –

*you could do your homework in your lessons and you could get into university on a low grade.*

(Interview: Mark, July, 1992)

His interest in doing well at A level and applying to higher education was secondary to becoming a professional footballer. His teachers characterised him as having ability and potential but never realising it. He was regarded as immature, only prepared to work at the things that interested him.

**TABLE 6: 'REJECTERS' GCSE RESULTS AND CRITERIA FOR SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

'Rejecters'	GCSEs at school	GCSEs at NSFC	Criteria for educational social disadvantage	Response to the HELC
Mark (middle class ) Anglo French	No GCSE passes at A-C comp in next borough	2 GCSEs	Under-achievement at school. Schooling disrupted by strikes	Largely negative response Poor attendance Other priorities: football
Max (working class) Black British	2 GCSEs local comp	2 GCSEs	Under-achievement at school Conflictual relationship with grandmother. School disrupted by strikes Ill health (sickle cell anaemia)	Largely negative Poor attendance Other priorities: paid employment
Seth (middle class) Black African	5 GCSEs local comp (private school 'til 13)	1 GCSE	Felt he needed the support to succeed Schooling disrupted by strikes	Largely negative Poor attendance other priorities: music

Max was characterised by his teachers as having ability but letting other things get in the way of his academic success. His attendance and punctuality were poor due to problems at home, a conflictual relationship with his grandmother who brought him up. He also suffered from ill health, in particular, sickle cell anaemia. His teachers regarded him as indecisive and in need of a lot of emotional support. He applied for the course, on the advice of his GCSE tutor, because he recognised that he needed the support and encouragement it would provide.

A very strong influence in Seth's life was his music. He was an award winning rap artist and spent a lot of time writing and recording songs. He explained how in his song writing he drew on his experiences of London and Sierra Leone as well as the 'black consciousness' he had developed from his time in a Seventh Day Adventist School. He felt that there was a real conflict for him between these interests and his academic studies. His teachers felt that he often neglected work that he found difficult and didn't organise his time or keep to deadlines. They felt he let his music get in the way of his academic work. Mark, Max and Seth had a mainly negative response to the learning support sessions and their attendance was poor. Seth describes why he stopped attending-

*Seth: I see it in two lights. In one way I think it is a positive thing because if you are just doing two A levels you can use the scheme to get into university easier. But I think at first it was a good course but as it dragged on interest died down. I was coming to the Link and I don't really think I was doing much. I really couldn't work in it so I stopped coming regularly.*

A.K: *Why did you find it difficult to work?*

Seth: *I don't know – after a hard day's work at college and coming here – I worked for a bit and then I just wanted to go home. It wasn't nothing to do with the atmosphere – just that I wasn't inspired to work.*

(Interview: Seth, May, 1992)

This indicates that he found it difficult to sustain a commitment to the course despite understanding why it was important. He refused to sign up to the course in the ways that teachers wanted.

These three students all had other activities that interfered with their commitment to these extra sessions. For Seth it was his music, for Mark his football practice on a Tuesday evening and for Max his work in a supermarket. They were all on the course to get learning support but 'refused' to make the commitment necessary. The fact that the three 'rejecters' were male needs to be interrogated. The data indicate their ambivalence about being 'academic' which involved succeeding at A level and becoming a university student. Data from Max is used in the next section to discuss the misrecognition that young black men like Max and Danny feel in trying to be accepted as 'academic'. The rejection of the learning support intentions of the HELC in favour of other priorities indicates a conflict for them in their choice of masculine subjectivities. The importance of football and music as a masculinizing cultural practice for young men is noted by Mac an Ghaill (1994:108) and is recognised as a factor that can work against academic success by Power, Whitty, Edwards and Wigfall (1998). The work of Aggleton (1987) with the 'new' middle class under-achievers provides some insight into the responses of Mark, Max and Seth in privileging other pursuits over the academic. Aggleton describes how the males in his study –

cultivated a relationship with academic work in which the display of *effortless achievement* was central. Many acted as if their own intrinsic talents alone would ensure success in GCE examinations. Notes were rarely, if ever taken in class, set work was seldom completed and lectures were for the large part sporadically attended. In consequence, it is perhaps little surprise that male students' academic attainment was low.

(Aggleton, 1987:73)

It is possible that Mark, Max and Seth cultivated a similar sort of approach to the HELC. It was difficult for them to embrace fully the identity of being an academic A level student. This conflicted with their subjectivities which required the legitimacy of more 'masculine' pursuits as a source of identity. As a result they gave priority to their

football or music or earning money which provided strong alternative male identities. Their orientation to their academic work was one of 'effortless achievement'. They indicated that they could manage without the learning support and that they would get by on their wits. This backfired seriously for them, as their 'effortless achievement' resulted in very poor A level grades.

### 7.7.1 'Rejecting' Higher Education

Mark was really keen to become a professional footballer and was hoping to spend the year after he finished his A levels playing football professionally. He said that he wanted to 'hedge his bets' and once he knew his A level grades he would make a decision about whether to apply to higher education -

*Being a university student, it will always be my second choice and that's if my first choice hasn't worked out ...that's football.*

(Interview: Mark, July, 1992)

His A level 'N' grade in Politics was disappointing and even if he had wanted to take up one of the 'insurance' offers as part of the scheme he would have needed two E grades to do so. This was just before massification when Polytechnics still required students to have a minimum number of GCSEs and A levels.

**TABLE 7: 'REJECTERS' A LEVEL RESULTS AND APPLYING TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

'Rejecters'	Predicted A level grades	Actual A level grades	Applications to H E	Destination
<b>Mark</b> ( middle class ) Anglo French	Media Studies C Politics C / D	Media Studies C Politics N	none	Professional footballer
<b>Max</b> ( working class) Black British	Politics E Psychology E	Politics U Psychology N	none	Working in a supermarket
<b>Seth</b> ( middle class) Black African	Media Studies D/E Art D/E Sociology (dropped)	Media Studies E Art E	Applied to four universities and four polytechnics to do Media Studies	Re-sitting A levels to improve grades in an FE college.

Max was indecisive about higher education. He said that as long as he was happy and content he didn't mind what he was doing. He always had his work at Sainsburys and he was considering their management courses. His explanation about how he felt about higher education indicates indecision as well as fear of not being really successful –

- A.K: *So what about higher education?*  
 Max: *I would like to go but I don't think it is the right time for me now as I feel I am not committed to education in the right way – if I want to be really successful.*  
 A.K: *But you don't rule it out altogether?*  
 Max: *No, I don't rule it out but it is a long-term commitment.*  
 (Interview: Max, April, 1992)

Although Seth did not 'refuse' higher education entirely, he recreated the degrees on offer in the scheme. This choice of Media Studies is analysed in more detail in the section on 'recreators'. He applied to four universities and four Polytechnics to do Media Studies. His first choice was City of London Polytechnic who had made him an offer of a C grade and a D grade at A level and a C in GCSE Maths. Seth only got two E grades so he was unable to take up this place. He could have chosen to apply to one of the Polytechnics in the scheme to have an 'insurance' offer. Instead he chose to resit his A levels at a further education college with a view to improving his grades, evidence of his determination to get onto a Media degree.

So Mark, Max and Seth 'refused' to make the necessary commitment to the HELC to enable them to get the required grades for higher education. They prioritised other interests, football, music and money making, consistent with stereotypically masculine identities. Despite the fact that they had embarked on a course specifically designed to offer opportunities for study in higher education for Max and Mark their real choices lay elsewhere at this point. Seth's failure to prioritise his academic work over his music resulted in a year of re-sitting A levels.

### **7.8 'Recreators': Danny, Denise, Eleni, Kit, Lola and Zelda**

In contrast to the others it is possible to argue that these students were more active in re-writing this policy. They did this to suit their own requirements and perceptions. They were also the majority group in this small cohort of students. They 'received' the parts of it that suited them and changed the elements that didn't suit their needs. Other students were also involved in creative re-interpretation but it is the extent to which this occurred that marks these students out. A look at their biographies serves to place such responses in context. Eleni, Kit, and Lola had seriously under-achieved at school. They spent a year doing GCSEs and on the advice of their tutors applied for the HELC. Zelda had difficulty



with her A levels and joined the HELC late on the advice of her teachers. Danny and Denise, both felt they needed the support of the HELC: Danny because he was on his second attempt at A levels and Denise because of her poor GCSE base. Table 8 provides a summary of these:

**TABLE 8: 'RECREATORS' GCSEs AND CRITERIA FOR SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

'Recreators'	GCSEs at school	GCSEs at NSFC	Criteria for social and educational disadvantage	Response to HELC
<b>Danny</b> (working class ) Black British	5 GCSEs local comp	1 GCSE	Under-achieved at school. School disrupted by strikes. Failed in his first attempt at A levels	Recreated both the learning support intentions and links with HE.
<b>Denise</b> (working class ) Black British	4 GCSEs local comp	1 GCSE	Under-achieved at school. School disrupted by strikes.	Recreated mainly the links with HE.
<b>Eleni</b> (intermediate class) Greek British	2 GCSEs local comp.	3 GCSEs	Under-achieved at school. School disrupted by strikes.	Recreated mainly the links with HE.
<b>Kit</b> ( working class) Afro-Caribbean	No GCSE passes A – C Comp. in the next boro'	4 GCSEs	Under-achieved at school. School disrupted by strikes.	Recreated both the learning support intentions and links with HE.
<b>Lola</b> (intermediate class) Black African	1 GCSEs local comp.	3 GCSEs	Under-achieved at school. School disrupted by strikes. Sickle cell aneamia.	Recreated both the learning support intentions and links with HE.
<b>Zelda</b> (middle class) Black British	4 GCSEs local comp.	1 GCSEs	Under-achieved at school. School disrupted by strikes.	Recreated both the learning support intentions and links with HE.

### 7.8.1 Recreating the Social Justice Intentions

Data reveal that some students felt labelled as a result of being on the HELC. This may have been felt by all the students, consciously or unconsciously but Danny, Max, Kit and Zelda discussed it in their interviews. As Danny felt most strongly about this I draw extensively on the relevant data from my interview with him. Here he describes how he came to join the course and how it made him feel-

*Danny: Because in the first year that I was here – I dropped out of all three A levels - I had major problems and my tutor suggested the Poly Link Course. It was a kind of an - insurance blanket – a sure fire way of getting into higher education which of course was my objective. The aim was for me to do two A levels and then to add to that the next year with a one year A level. And she told me about its features, about the extra time it gives to*

*students to help with revision timetables and getting help with especially Humanities and the links with various HE places, Northside University and the University of Oakfields. So I thought considering as how I struggled the first year with the three A levels I felt this was a good thing to join. I felt a bit inferior though – I felt that – well my original thought was – I'm gonna need this course therefore I must be kind of dumb – you know inferior to other students who are not on the course.*

*AK: Couldn't you say the opposite is true – if you have recognised what you need – that you do need help and you have gone for it – that's a strength rather than a weakness.*

*Danny: But at the time, I didn't really think of it like that. I felt as though I was going down academically because I was going from 3 A levels to 2 – but the fact that I was going on a course which – just the word SUPPORT it means that you must be really dumb- you know- I need a lot of help and I had a problem with that. I think I still do actually.*

*(Interview: Danny, May, 1992)*

He went on to explain how he felt the course was a great help but the fact that students on it were just doing two A levels singled them out when the norm for university entrance was three or even four. He felt that the links with universities offering lower than normal offers was also stigmatising –

*Danny: but by offering - by having links with certain polytechnics –who then make low offers – I think that seems to suggest that only a certain type of person - applies to that course. It seems to me that the vast majority of students – seem to have minimal problems – I won't say no problems – they can cope with their A levels – their 3 or 4 A levels just fine – you know and here I am struggling with just 2.*

*(Interview: Danny, May, 1992)*

He then moves on to describe how he and other students discussed how they actually felt in lessons –

*Danny: I think –I suppose you build up a collective identity but then again I always have this feeling that – especially in lessons - that there is a kind of STIGMA attached to the Poly Link Course. I think that some people have told me that they feel – inferior when they go into a class – they're on the Poly Link course and they know that the majority of students in that class aren't – all those students are doing three A levels and I think they feel kind of inferior – and I think the teachers make them feel like that – I think there is a stigma attached and I think that the teachers who teach on the course on the Poly Link course are fully aware of that.*

AK: *Are there any other examples of this labelling that you have encountered?*

Danny: *Me personally – not obvious examples – no-one has actually come up to me and said - ah you're on the Poly Link course – you're inferior – though sometimes I do feel that the teachers are aware of that and this reflects in their teaching - for example – in the fact that they seem to give me more attention as though because I am on the Poly Link Course – I'm gonna have more problems with the course and so they give me more attention than the others and sometimes I feel really uncomfortable about this. Although I haven't mentioned it to them. That's an example! I have to interpret the teachers' meanings behind giving me more attention - I mean is it because I am on the course or something else?*

(Interview: Danny, May, 1992)

Danny then went on to explain where he felt such attitudes to students like him on support courses came from –

Danny: *It was like this in secondary school – people who went on courses – Support courses – were generally seen to be THICK or DUMB - I think that transferred here.*

AK: *You think people bring that with them?*

Danny: *Yes, but people are not supposed to have those kind of thoughts here in this kind of establishment in inverted commas!*

(Interview: Danny, May, 1992)

Danny expressed his feelings about the course very clearly and strongly as well as claiming to speak for others. He was a black, working class, male and 'academic' who was on his second attempt at A levels. These data do pinpoint how he re-interpreted the intentions of the course and highlights the emotional, painful, and contradictory feelings involved in needing the help provided by the course but hating the stigmatisation. Danny's negative experiences of secondary schooling and his failure in his first attempt at A level positioned him in a way that was difficult to reverse. His prior positioning meant that he brought values with him from secondary school that support courses like this one were only for 'dumb' students. These data show a strong resentment and frustration that being given the help he needed resulted in him being seen as 'different' and 'inferior' but at the same time he recognised that he needed the help. This level of support could not be made available to everyone because of the resource implications but

the process of targeting and therefore labelling disadvantaged him further, he felt.

This illustrates what Fraser (1997) calls the redistribution-recognition dilemma outlined in Chapter Three and referred to in Chapter Six. She separates the different oppressions in order to discuss them analytically but in Danny's case they work together as he is a young, black, working class, male. The HELC, in calling for remedies to counter former injustices made claims for the redistribution of resources in favour of students like Danny. The bivalent nature of Danny's identity is the source of the dilemma requiring as it does, two distinct kinds of remedy which pull in opposite directions and are difficult to pursue simultaneously. Redistribution calls for extra resources to be provided to dissolve the inequalities of provision which have resulted in poor educational attainment. At the same time as a working class, black male Danny requires recognition of his 'difference' to overcome the current, powerful demeaning stereotypical depictions of the under-achieving and non-academic black male. The HELC was an affirmation strategy involving some redistribution of resources. It may be however, that this redistribution was insufficient to counter former disadvantage. Calls to counter the misrecognition of such 'non-traditional' students resulted in disadvantaging them further-

Affirmative redistribution can stigmatise the disadvantaged, adding the insult of misrecognition to the injury of deprivation. Transformative redistribution, in contrast, can promote solidarity, helping to redress some forms of misrecognition.

(Fraser, 1997:26)

It was not only Danny but also Max, whom I have included in the 'rejecters' categorisation, a young, black, working class male who felt the labelling effects of the course. Max's interview indicates how difficult both he and Danny found it to overcome the demeaning stereotypes of young black men. Their attempts to become 'academic' involved overcoming some strong misrecognition which Max tries to explain -

*Max: I've never really identified with being African-Caribbean. Most people don't see me as being a proper black person really I don't think...*

*A.K: What do they see you as middle class and black?*

*Max: I don't know. They think that ... they don't seem to understand...maybe because I don't like listening to black music.*

A.K: *You're not the stereotype?*

Max : *...and talking slang and everything like that.*

A.K: *That's interesting.*

Max: *So, they have misconceptions when they first meet me; they're expecting me to be the typical black guy, whatever that is! And even the black friends I have aren't typical... well look at Danny ...most people don't really see him as being black; don't really look at him in those terms and don't seem to understand him either ...more than me, because he is wanting to go to the bar and be a barrister.*

(Interview: Max, June, 1997)

Max is describing the misrecognition of young black males like him and Danny. They are trying to position themselves as A level students and potential higher education students against some of the current discourses which position young black men in demeaning ways (see the work of Gillborn, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Sewell, 1997). From Max's experience described here such misrecognition comes from their peers as well, both black and white.

Another 'recreator' was Kit - working class, female and black. She describes how, even though she has such feelings of stigmatisation, she quickly overcame them -

Kit: *At first when you said you was on the Poly Link it was like you were a dunce as though if you need extra support there's something wrong with you – but – I don't – the way I see it if somebody's there and willing to help you why not use them - then why not get all the help – ignore all the other people. So I got over that quite easily.*

(Interview: Kit, April, 1992)

This is on the surface a more rational response from Kit and perhaps a gendered response indicating that is easier for young black women than young black men to re-position themselves as academic (see Mirza, 1997 for a discussion of this).

Such responses indicate ambivalent positions with students resenting the support but also actively taking advantage of it. For Max, Danny and Kit initially, the policy intentions were re-interpreted into something that made them feel stigmatised and labelled but the support was also regarded as useful. Lisa, a 'receiver' was able to appear to overcome the labelling by parodying it or making it into a joke.

The various responses of these 'recreators' highlight the problem with affirmative action. In seeking to provide learning support for students this involved separating them off from their peers and identifying them as 'different'. For these students they felt that this compounded rather than lessened the stigma.

### 7.8.2 Recreating the learning support

The 'recreators' thought that the collaborative group identity did not really exist and for Lola this lack related to poor attendance as she describes-

*AK: Do you feel that there is a good group identity?*

*Lola: No I don't think that is part of the atmosphere --  
I think it's just everyone for themselves really. The tutor suggested that we form like revision groups, those students doing the same subjects but it's a problem because not everyone comes in all the time so I don't really think we are supportive to each other.*

*(Interview: Lola, April, 1992)*

This also indicates a tension between individualism and the development of a collaborative atmosphere that was part of the aims of the course. It is possible that the strong group identity was an idea that existed in the heads of the tutors and rather for the students themselves.

However the 'recreators' did also feel that they needed some of the support on offer. This was particularly true of those students whose parents did not have the cultural capital to pass on. Students mentioned the high level of individual support they received from the tutor and they noted that this wasn't just help with academic study as Kit explains -

*The teacher who's running the HELC is quite supportive to you for personal problems as well as with problems with your work.... and they are always pushing and willing for you to do well...which is good for some people who don't have that outside college.*

*(Interview: Kit, April, 1992)*

This can be seen as the interaction between familial habitus and institutional habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Reay, 1998). The institution and course attempted to compensate for knowledge and dispositions not present at home. These were necessary to unlock the code of succeeding at A level and applying to higher education. Kit and Lola emphasised how necessary this aspect of the course was for them because their parents,

though supportive, did not understand what was involved as Kit explains –

*AK: What do your parents think about you going onto higher education?*

*Kit: Oh, they're all for it and er... they're not encouraging but they want me to go onto HE if you can understand that ..*

*AK: Em.*

*Kit : Do you want me to explain? They wouldn't ask me how I'm doing or if I need help with anything or - I don't even think they know what I am doing actually – but they are all for me making something of myself and improving myself and getting all the education that I can.*

(Interview: Kit, April, 1992)

This indicates that despite the robust support from working-class parents for their children to do well in the educational system they had no real idea of what was involved and seemed to have a fear of engaging with the process. Lola also describes this lack of understanding –

*I think because of my home background. My mum and dad wanted me to achieve but they didn't encourage me as in asking me if I had done my homework or how's it going. They just said I had to do well and there was no discussion.*

(Interview: Lola April, 1992)

And she talks about the process of applying to university –

*At first when I applied to university my mum and dad didn't know I'd applied and when I got interviews they just wished me luck. They hadn't even asked me how my revision had gone...but they really want me to go on to do a degree.*

(Interview: Lola, April, 1992)

This lack of support and relevant knowledge from parents was, to some degree made up for by having the tutor and teachers on the HELC. These tutors could provide emotional as well as academic support as well as all the knowledge necessary to deal with the process of applying to higher education. Some aspects of this were 'received' even by the 'recreators' who selected these out because they provided them with the opportunity to acquire some of the cultural capital, that is, dispositions, cultural goods and educational qualifications necessary to succeed in the academic market.

### 7.8.3 Recreating the Higher Education Intentions

This section examines how students changed the higher education options on offer to meet their own agendas. Table 9 provides a summary to contextualise their higher education choices.

**TABLE 9: 'RECREATING' THE HIGHER EDUCATION OPTIONS**

'Recreators'	Predicted A level grades	Actual A level grades	Applications to HE /FE	Destination at this point
Danny (working class ) Black British	English B/C Sociology B/C	English C Sociology C	Applied to 4 Polytechnics to do English	Polytechnic to do English but transferred to Law.
Denise (working class) Black British	Bus.St.(A/S) E English E	Bus.St.(A/S) E English E	Applied to FE to do NNEB	NNEB course.
Eleni (intermediate class) Greek British	Media St. C/D Photography C/D	Media St. D Photography E	Applied to 3 universities and 4 polytechnics for Media St. but received no offers. Applied for Colleges of Art and Design.	College of Art to do Media Studies.
Kit (working class) Afro-Caribbean	Sociology D/E English C	Sociology D/E English C	Applied to 4 universities and 4 polytechnics for Media /Communication St.	University in London to do Communication Studies.
Lola (intermediate class) Black African	Sociology B/C English C	Sociology E English D	Applied to 5 universities and 5 polytechnics for Media /Communication St.	FE college to re-sit A levels to improve grades
Zelda (middle class) Black British.	Media Studies C / D English C/D	Media Studies C English D	Applied to 5 universities and 4 polytechnics for Media St.	University to do Media Studies. Deferred for a year

Many of the students had been initially attracted to the HELC because it offered an 'insurance' offer of two E grades at three institutions in higher education. However, when they actually came to decide on a degree course to apply for in these link institutions the courses they wanted were either not available or part of the original agreement. Lola explains –

*Now I'm on it, I now know that the links with the Polytechnics hardly helped me at all, because they are offering to students ... they are not the courses I want to do, so in that sense it hasn't helped me but its alright because we get support and help when it comes to the UCCA business....*

(Interview: Lola, April, 1992)

Most of the students, like Lola, indicated that the help with applying to university had been invaluable but that the HELC links were too narrow and inflexible.

What is interesting here is why students rejected the two E grade insurance offers in Humanities and Social Science degrees in favour of Media Studies. Why reject the safer offer of a degree in Humanities and Social Science in favour of a riskier application to even more over-subscribed degree courses? Recent research on choice in Post-16



careers (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000; Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996) focussed on different groups of young peoples' transitions from school. Hodkinson et al (1996) studied ten young people on a youth training scheme. Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) studied a broader range of young people in terms of sex, social class, ethnicity, academic attainment with a variety of choices and pathways. The study breaks new ground by describing young adults –

.....on the periphery of new urban economies and who are so wonderfully different from those 'individual, rational calculators, [the] human capitalists' who stalk the pages of Government White papers on education.

(Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000)

Both studies found that students did not make career decisions according to the method assumed in dominant current policy making outlined in the quote above, that of rational choice. For Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996), their data revealed that 'pragmatically' rational decision making was located in the habitus of the person making the decision –

The pragmatically rational decision making we observed was grounded in the culture and identities of the young people we interviewed. Their decisions were bounded by horizons for action. These were determined by the external job or educational opportunities in interaction with personal perceptions of what was possible, desirable or appropriate. Those perceptions, in turn were derived from their culture and life histories. In this way job opportunities were always objective and subjective.

(Hodkinson et al, 1996:123)

They also found that many students entered or rejected an occupation based on personal experience, often advice from 'significant others' or from their own work experience. Decisions were based on partial information located in what was familiar and known. Trainees were opportunistic, exploiting contacts and experiences, they found. Their choices were only partly rational, in the conventional sense of the word, also based on desire and emotions. Decisions made could not be separated from life histories, culture and family background. Applying the concept of pragmatically rational decision making to the students in this research who wanted careers in the Media is useful. It is worth considering the 'horizons for action' of these 'recreators'. One of the reasons they gave for their choice was that Media degrees would offer Lola, Eleni, Zelda and Kit careers in the Media as TV producer, researcher, photographer and journalist. At first these choices

would seem completely irrational as Media Studies degrees are over subscribed and the Media industry is notoriously difficult to enter. In discussions about career decisions students indicated that they were very aware of the difficulties surrounding this choice but determined to go ahead anyway. Lola explains –

*Lola: I'd like to be either a reporter or writer on a black arts programme. Something to do with black culture, youth – I'd like to work for something like the Voice or a black magazine like Black Beauty. I'd like to be a reporter for something like Reportage where they tackle youth issues.*

*A.K: You do know that's a hard field to get into*

*Lola: Yes.*

*A.K: But you are still going to go for it?*

*Lola: Yes.*

(Interview: Lola, April, 1992)

Choices like these were the result of complex influences. Students described how they had all really enjoyed A level and/or GCSE Media Studies courses at NSFC. These courses were very well run and resourced with a well-equipped TV studio. Media Studies was regarded as a 'sexy' subject at NSFC. Kit, Lola and Zelda had black Mentors who were famous black TV presenters and producers. They had provided work experience and summer paid work in TV and on a black Londoners' newspaper. This had introduced students to a glamorous, exciting and challenging world. These Mentors were 'significant others', important role models and a source of contacts and networks and what Ball et al (2000) call 'hot knowledge'. Culturally the three young women, Kit, Lola and Zelda were rejecting stereotyped career choices. Mirza's research (1997:271) indicates that black women chose realistic careers that they knew to be accessible and historically available to them: for example, social work and other caring jobs such as nursing and office work. Lola, Kit and Zelda were attempting to enter high status, risky occupations. They explained their choice also as the need for there to be more programmes tailored to the various needs of the black community which they felt they would like to contribute to. They also pointed out the under-representation of black presenters and producers in the media. Eleni had had similar work experience providing contacts in the local Greek community.

Northside college was also influential as a 'new middle class' institution: many of the parents had important jobs in the media. The borough of Northside was very much a media borough with lots of TV personalities living in its Georgian Squares and terraces. A local theatre school was used as a recruiting ground for young actors and several NSFC students appeared in soap operas on TV. Employment in the Media felt within the reach of young people in Northside. Aggleton (1987) offers some insight into why media careers might be attractive to such young people. The students in his study rejected the academic route to such employment but valued the relative autonomy of expression provided-

.....popular forms of employment were those which offered negotiable working conditions, the chance to meet 'interesting people' and a weakening of the distinction between work and leisure.

(Aggleton, 1987 : 131)

These four students, and Seth, applied for Media Studies, a very competitive degree course. They rejected the links with higher education the HELC supplied. In view of this they all seemed to have got very favourable offers. The exception was Eleni who had had to apply to Art Colleges. Kit indicated that the fact that she was on the HELC had helped to get her onto a degree course at a university not in the scheme with lower than normal A level grades. So one of the policy effects was that other institutions looked on these students more favourably because of the HELC. The academics at the interview had told her they were impressed with her account of the HELC and especially the emphasis placed on study skills. Other students however, especially Lola, felt strongly that the fact that they were only taking two A levels when the norm was three had worked against them -

*When I've been going for my interviews at Polys and Unis and that they've been like asking me why I'm doing two A levels so I think that the Link course should be for students doing three A levels as well. They tend to think that you're not capable of doing three and look at you and think why are you doing two? I had to explain what it was about because they didn't see why I was only doing two.*

(Interview: Lola, April, 1992)

This indicates that despite commitments in official 'texts' outlined in Chapter Five to change admissions policies to adapt to the needs of 'non-traditional' applicants, some Polytechnics and universities, at this time, regarded any deviation from the standard three A level norm as problematic.

Danny and Denise 'rejected' the higher education options on offer but in different ways. Denise had originally thought of becoming a primary school teacher by doing a B.Ed course. She was worried about the further financial strain of a four-year course on her parents. She decided that a nursery nurses' course would be a better option. Her choices needed to be made in terms of her 'horizon for action' (Hodkinson et al, 1996: 3) especially her family background. Her father's working class occupation and the fact that her mother did not work outside the home meant that there was pressure about the financial resources required for higher education. This decision is explored in more detail in Chapter Eight. So despite embarking on and completing the HELC which was designed to offer opportunities for study in higher education she rejected these in favour of a course in further education. This, she felt, more adequately suited her needs at the time.

Danny also rejected the links with higher education on offer as part of the course. As a result of feeling stigmatised and only doing 2 A levels he only applied to four Polytechnics rather than to universities. As he explains -

*Danny: I didn't think it would be worth applying to universities with just 2 A levels. It turned out that that decision was ill founded because a friend on the HELC got an offer from a university and he was just doing 2 A levels - so that turned out to be ill founded.*

*AK: Did you ask the advice of John Barton?*

*Danny: Not really - I don't think I asked for advice - I just made that decision on my own.*

*(Interview: Danny, May, 1992)*

He was accepted to do English at a Polytechnic but changed to Law once he started. It may also have been possible that some students, like Danny, made a conscious decision not to apply to the link institutions as Angela Downside, the tutor on the course introduced in Chapter Six, explains-

*So I think maybe there might have been an issue for some of them that they didn't want to be ...to go to another ...continue the kind of labelling or whatever ..*

*(Interview: Angela Downside, April, 1997)*

So these students 'recreated' the opportunities to study in higher education

using, in some cases, the HELC as an advantage in applying for degrees that were not part of the scheme. They ignored or went against the advice of tutors, by applying for much more competitive Media Studies degrees.

### **7.9 Conclusion: Tensions within the policy: Redistribution and Recognition**

In the context of local text production the various architects of this policy were clear about their social justice intentions. However in the context of practice such intentions became problematic. This is what Bowe et al 1992:13 refer to as 'contextual slippages' that occur as a policy is re-made through continual process of the policy cycle. The ways in which the students in the third cohort made the policy 'their own' is outlined above: students were characterised as 'receivers', 'rejecters' and 'recreators'. These responses to the HELC indicate that certain parts were more open to creative re-interpretation than others.

One of the interesting issues from the re-making of this policy was that for some of the students, most noticeably and negatively, Danny and Max, the policy had the opposite effects from those intended. They found some aspects of it stigmatising. Data from teachers in Chapter Six indicate that teachers were aware of these unavoidable negative effects.

There was a conflict at the heart of this policy: in order to make a case for extra resources for students who had 'under-achieved' in secondary school their 'difference' had to be emphasised. But in doing so they were labelled and possibly stigmatised in the process. This course, in calling for remedies to counter former injustices, made claims for the redistribution of resources in favour of HELC students. Fraser (1997) describes oppressed groups whose oppression is the result of both the political-economic structure and the cultural-valuational structure of society as bivalent collectivities. Such collectivities suffer both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition and therefore require both redistributive and recognition remedies. She argues that the bivalent nature of identities is the source of the dilemma requiring as it does two distinct kinds of remedy which pull in opposite directions and are difficult to pursue simultaneously. Redistribution calls for extra resources to be provided to dissolve the effects of inequalities of provision which have resulted in poor educational attainment.

Recognition requires that account is taken of students' differences. In providing the extra resources for HELC students in the form of two and a half hours of extra support the policy may have, in identifying them as different, stigmatised them further. The extent to which students felt labelled was one factor in their different responses to the policy.

A further issue emerges as six out of the twelve students achieved lower than predicted A level grades in the final examination as table 10 illustrates:

**TABLE 10: PREDICTED AND ACTUAL A LEVEL GRADES**

Name	Predicted A level grades	Actual A Level results 1992
Ade	Sociology E Psychology E	Sociology E Psychology D
Danny	English B/C Sociology B/C	English C Sociology C
Denise	Bus. Studies (A/S) E English E	Bus. Studies E English E
Eleni	Media Studies C/ D Photography C/D	Media Studies D Photography E
Kit	Sociology D/E English C	Sociology D English D
Lisa	Art D Politics C / D Sociology C *	Art D Politics D Sociology C *
Lola	Sociology B/C English C	Sociology E English D
Mark	Media Studies C Politics C/D	Media Studies C Politics N
Max	Politics E Psychology E	Politics U Psychology N
Seth	Media St. D/ E Art D/ E Sociology (dropped) *	Media St. E Art E
Tim	Politics C Geography B/ C	Politics E Geography E
Zelda	Media Studies C /D English C / D	Media Studies C English D

- The norm for this course was 2 A levels but Lisa took 3 as did Seth initially but dropped Sociology.

These grades were disappointing given the levels of support provided for students even if some of the support was 'rejected' or 'recreated'. It could be argued that this provision was insufficient to compensate for former disadvantage and therefore the redistribution of resources was inadequate. This could result in a deepening of the process of stigmatisation with students being regarded as the cause of their own failure. This would be based on the assumption that despite extra resources they still failed to achieve good A level grades.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter 'policies then are textual interventions but they also carry with them material constraints and possibilities'. The different responses of students indicates that creative re-interpretation of the HELC was possible. What Ball (1994a) calls 'policy as text' the agency side of this access policy is useful here to indicate that even the 'receivers' were not just passive recipients of this policy. The HELC became a different text in the context of practice with students accepting only the parts of the policy that met their needs and rejecting or recreating others. All but three students rejected the links with Polytechnics on offer as part of the scheme. For five students it was in favour of much more risky, but exciting, degrees in Media Studies. Thus rejecting the stereotyped 'safe' career options traditionally available to young black students (Mirza, 1997:271).

As Bowe et al (1992) assert 'practitioners do not confront policy texts as naïve readers, they come with histories, with experience, with values and purposes of their own' (p. 22). The extent to which students could 'recreate' the text was constrained by their experiences before they came to NSFC. The constraint side of policies is described by Ball (1994a) as 'policy as discourse'. Such discourses set the limits for these students as to what is 'thinkable' and 'unthinkable'. Their experiences at secondary school had led them to believe that they were not capable of taking A levels and progressing onto higher education. The aim of the HELC was to reverse these assumptions and to provide students with the cultural capital necessary to succeed. However their 'histories, experiences and values' were difficult to undo. The assumption that students who needed extra support were 'dumb' was a value brought by Danny from his secondary school. Most of these students carried with them the label of failure when they came to NSFC because of their poor GCSE results. Their education had also been disrupted by various factors including teachers' industrial action. Most of them had identified strongly with a school culture that made it difficult to achieve academically if you wanted to remain popular with your peers. They also suffered in different ways from the results of structural inequalities such as racism, sexism and elitism.

The next chapter continues to tell the stories of these students by tracking progress of this cohort in the transition to higher or further education and employment in the final context of the policy cycle, the context of outcomes. The main focus of the

chapter will be the continuities and discontinuities of students' response to this policy. It will also consider the longer-term consequences of such responses.

Endnote.

Table 2. <sup>1</sup> The numbers in brackets after the parental occupations denote the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) social class categories Professionals =1; Associate professionals = 2 Intermediate = 3; Self employed non -professionals = 4; Employed skilled manual workers = 5; Routine occupations = 6; Elementary occupations = 7; Unemployed = 8. HE = denotes that a parent completed higher education



## Chapter Eight

### Access to higher education and employment: choices and constraints

#### 8.1 Introduction

One of the main policy intentions of the Higher Education Link Course (HELC) was to open up opportunities for study in higher education to 'non-traditional' students and to produce collaborative and autonomous learners with the skills to cope with the demands of such study. The focus of this chapter is to continue to examine the relationship between policy intentions and policy effects at this point in the policy cycle, the context of outcomes. The focus is the outcomes of this policy in terms of the cohorts' experiences of further and higher education and employment. Ball (1994a) describes this context –

Here the analytical concern is with issues of justice, equality and individual freedom. Policies are analysed in terms of their impact upon and interactions with existing inequalities and forms of injustice. (Ball, 1994a: 26)

The central question is whether, in their career experiences post-NSFC, students continued to selectively appropriate parts of the policy, or reject or accept it entirely, to pursue their own agendas. As outlined in the previous chapter, in the context of practice, this cohort of students made and re-made the policy according to their needs, and against the background of the micro politics of Northside Sixth Form College (NSFC). Such conflict and struggle continued in the lives of these students post-college - best characterised by stops, starts, disruptions, interruptions, years repeated and incomplete modules. The rationale for extending this research and tracking such experiences, by following students into further and higher education and employment, is to consider the longer-term consequences of initial individual responses to the policy. This adds to our understanding of the policy cycle, in particular, the impact of this policy over time on existing inequalities of opportunity for this small group of students.

The chapter has seven main sections. The first considers very briefly the main changes in transitions from school to work and in the labour market relevant to this cohort. The second provides a link with the previous chapter and discusses the fortunes of the receivers, rejecters and recreators in this new context of higher and further education and work. Reference to Ball's (1994a) theorising of 'policy as discourse' and 'policy as

text' as the structure and agency aspects of students' responses to the HELC is made in the third section. The fourth focuses on the responses of the three students, Ade, Lisa and Tim, called 'receivers' in the context of practice but now juggling and struggling with the demands of higher education. The experiences of the 'rejecters' Mark, Max and Seth are then considered in the fifth section. The sixth looks at the trajectories of the 'recreators' Kit, Lola and Zelda who completed their degrees in higher education in three years and Eleni and Denise who chose other careers. Danny refused to be part of the research from this point on. Finally there is a very short conclusion as many of the issues that emerge from the experiences of this cohort are discussed in the final chapter.

## **8.2 Themes for Complex Transitions**

In the 1990s transitions from school to work have undergone complex changes. Such changes are described by Ainley and Cohen (1999) –

Young people do not simply view work and study in the linear, sequential way implied by the conventional career paradigm and by the policy formulations based upon it. Images about 'pathways' and linear transitions from school via further study and then into the world of work and an independent adult way of life do not reflect the actual experience of growing up. Young people are establishing different patterns of response which involve complicated mixtures of leaving and returning to the parental home, of part-time work and part-time study, of full time study and part-time work and even full-time work and full-time study.

(Ainley and Cohen, 1999: 11)

The data in this study indicate support for the existence of such complicated mixtures of study and employment even within a relatively homogeneous group of students on a scheme aimed at providing progression into higher education. Similarly the transitions from higher education into work reflect the changing nature of the labour market and graduate employment. Research by Nove, Snape and Chetwynd (1999), Fallows and Steven (2000) indicates that increased numbers of graduates leaving universities, 1.5 million in 1997, (IES Annual Graduate Review, 1997) have resulted in much greater competition for the professions and traditional graduate occupations. As a result of this expansion the type of occupations into which graduates are moving are becoming increasingly diverse. Graduates are as likely to be in non-graduate jobs as graduate jobs with only a minority gaining employment that directly utilises the academic content of their degrees. The research indicates that it is transferable skills and personal attributes

that are valued by employers. Other research indicates that it may take graduates as long as three years to reach employment considered to be graduate employment, Connor (1997), Elias (1999), even if their degrees are vocationally related. The labour market has also changed with permanence in career paths replaced by an emphasis on flexible specialisation and short-term contracts in a system that Sennett (1998) calls 'flexible capitalism.' Much flatter management structures have replaced steep hierarchies. There has been a decline in traditional heavy industries replaced to some extent by globalised, service sector employment especially in new technology and media. These economic factors coupled with political and social changes resulting from neo-liberal conservative policies in the 1980s and 1990s have radically changed the nature of paid work (Dahrendorf, 1999). Young people, like those in this cohort, face a greater emphasis in their working lives on choice, individual enterprise and responsibility as well as deepening inequalities of wealth (Beck, 1992). Writing of the ways in which transitions to work have changed for young people since the 1960s, Evans and Furlong (1997) describe how metaphors have been used to reflect the dominant theoretical perspectives. The use of 'trajectories,' in the 1980s with its emphasis on structural factors largely outside the control of social actors has been replaced in the 1990s with the metaphor of *navigation* –

Reflecting the emergence of reflexive and post-structuralist perspectives, in the 1990s, metaphors of *navigation* started to emerge. Individuals came to be seen as 'navigating perilous waters' and 'negotiating their way through a sea of manufactured uncertainty.' Within this model, successful transitions came to be seen as dependent on individual skill and capability as well as external risks and the ability to judge them. (Evans and Furlong, 1997:18)

Such emphasis on individual skill is also noted by other research, what Savage (2000) refers to as –

the 'individualization' of the middle class career. Rather than envisaging their careers as hierarchically staged, many of our respondents define their work prospects as 'a project of the self', allowing individuals to pursue their own 'life projects' in an environment offering them the resources and scope for self-development'. (Savage, 2000: 140)

Issues on this theme of the relationship between individual and structural factors in shaping 'life projects,' in particular, in relation to the transition to higher education and work for this cohort of students emerge in this chapter.

### **8.3 Receivers, Recreators and Rejecters**

In the autumn of 1992 only six students, (Kit, Lisa, Danny, Tim, Eleni, and Ade) out of twelve, began their degree courses. As discussed in the previous chapter all the students, except Lisa, Tim and Ade rejected the links with Polytechnics (which became universities in 1992) that were part of the HELC offering an entry of two E grades at A level. Ade was the only student to actually take up a link place at the University of Northside. The others 'recreated' this aspect of the policy to pursue the degrees of their choice. Max and Mark rejected the idea of higher education entirely at this point. Seth and Lola decided to re-sit A levels to improve their grades necessary to get places on Media degree courses. Denise chose a training route instead and started her NNEB course in a further education college. Zelda deferred her degree place for a year to work on a black London newspaper. Table 11 below provides trajectories of the students from their GCSE results at school through to their occupational destinations in 1997 as well as their various responses to the policy in the context of practice and the context of outcomes. Table 1. shows that in this context students' career trajectories post college were diverse and cannot simply be read off from their responses at NSFC. The continuities and discontinuities of response will be discussed in each section as well as the individual nature of such agendas.

**TABLE 11: STUDENT TRAJECTORIES AND RESPONSES 1990 - 1997**

Name	GCSEs at School	GCSEs at NSFC	Actual A Level results 1992	Response to HELC	Response to higher education	Degree result	Employment
Ade	Drama C History C Media St C Science C Sociology C	English B Maths C	Sociology E Psychology D	Receiver	Degree took 4 years. One year repeated	2:2 in Law	Trainee accountant
Danny	Commerce C Design C English C History C Science C	Maths C	English C Sociology C	Re-creator	Refused to be part of the research	2:1 in Law	Clerk in a solicitors office
Denise	Child Dev. C Drama C English Lang. C English Lit. C	Maths C	Bus. Studies E English E	Recreator	NNEB course rather than HE	NNEB	Nursery nurse
Eleni	Art & Design C CDT. B	English C Media St.C Photography B	Media Studies D Photography E	Recreator	One year in HE then NNEB course	NNEB	Nursery nurse
Kit	No GCSE passes at A - C	Com St C Maths C Media St. B Theatre Arts A	Sociology D English D	Recreator	Degree within 3 years	2:2 in Sociology and Communications	Professional gospel singer
Lisa	Art & Design C Drama B	English B	Art D Politics D Sociology C	Receiver	Degree took 4 years. One module short	2:1 in Psycho-social studies.	Account handler in an advertising agency
Lola	Drama A	Com.St B English B Psychology C	Sociology E English D (resits 1993 2 x Bs)	Re-creator	Degree in 3 years after re-sitting her A levels	2:2 in Broadcast Journalism	Advertising planner in a local newspaper
Mark	No GCSE passes at A - C	English C Law C Media C	Media Studies C Politics N	Rejecter	Rejected HE at this point	N/A	Professional footballer
Max	English Lit. C Maths C	Law B Psychology B	Politics U Psychology N	Rejecter	Rejected HE at this point	N/A	Various p/time work
Seth	Art & Design A Drama C English Lit.C English Lang. C History C	Maths. C	Media St. E Art E (resits 1993 2 x Ds)	Rejecter	Re.sat his A levels. Spent one year in HE .Returned to HE in London.	2:1 in Media Studies.	Musician
Tim	English Lang. C English Lit. C Geog. C	Law B Maths C Media St. B	Politics E Geography E	Receiver	Degree took 4 hears. One year repeated and changed degree course	2:2 in the Built Environment.	Works in a planning office
Zelda	CDT C English Lang C Latin C Spanish C	Maths C	Media Studies C English D	Re-creator	Got a degree in 3 years	2:1 in Media Studies	P/t temp work in the Media.

#### **8.4 Freedom to Choose Within Constraints**

The extent to which students could follow their own agendas post-college was constrained by structural factors. While students were not passive recipients of the policy neither were they completely free agents. As discussed in Chapter Six, Ball (1994a) deals with this theoretically in his approach to policy when he distinguishes between 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse' which he considers implicit in each other. 'Policy as text' for my purposes here deals with the agency side of this access policy, how students acted creatively on the text in ways that are inherently messy, ambiguous and unpredictable. This is a useful antidote to top down models of the policy process which regard policy as something that 'gets done to people'. Whereas in this model 'policy as discourse' deals more with 'constraint' as discourses frame what can be said and thought and by whom, setting discursive limitations. While the dominant discourses of higher education policy positioned these 'non-traditional' students in particular ways, this was more than merely the level of ideas there were also *material* factors at work. More emphasis is given here to a structural analysis of power, than is often allowed for when applying Ball's policy cycle with its emphasis on micro technologies of local power. In Chapter Three I explained how I would selectively appropriate parts of the policy cycle model in order to draw on both post-structuralist and structural analyses. Feminist critics (Epstein and Kenway, 1996; Henry, 1993; Hey, 1996) of policy sociology concerns also assert that the complex inter-weavings of social class, ethnicity and gender in policy effects should be considered. Such effects will be discussed through the ways in which this cohort of students' educational, domestic and occupational biographies were played out.

#### **8.5 From 'Receivers' to Jugglers and Strugglers: Ade, Lisa and Tim**

Ade, Lisa and Tim all chose to go on to higher education and in this sense the policy agenda of the teachers coincided with their own. They had been 'receivers' of the policy at NSFC with their responses described in Chapter Seven. They recognised that they needed all the learning and emotional support on offer. For Lisa and Tim, when they left the supportive environment of the college, and home, their lives were not easy. For this reason the category 'receivers' becomes inappropriate in this context. Juggling and struggling better describes their experiences. Their biographies indicate that 'success' in terms of the intentions of the policy in one context does not automatically ensure success

in another context. Having been successful receivers of the policy in the context of practice their room for manoeuvre in the context of outcomes was severely constrained. Such constraints included the culture of higher education with its emphasis on competition and individual progress, the lack of learning and emotional support from tutors, the size and structure of the student body that did not encourage collaboration between students. For Ade and Lisa there was also the necessity of combining study with paid work in order to survive financially. For these students being in higher education meant entering the 'big bad world,' in contrast to the small, supportive and well-resources world of NSFC.

For them all, the post-college careers of these three students were dominated by struggle with the academic demands of their courses. For Lisa and Ade there was the additional juggling resulting from the conflicting demands made on Lisa and Ade in their lives outside university. They are grouped together because their degrees took longer than the normal three years to complete. Their lives at university were characterised by essays not handed in, deadlines not met, re-sits, years repeated and lost modules. They all attended 'new' universities, Ade to read Law in North London, Lisa, Psycho-Social Studies in East London, and Tim, Town Planning in the South-West of England. For Lisa and Ade there were the constant problems of juggling employment, housing, their domestic lives and the demands of academic courses with very little academic support. Tim found the academic and organisational demands of his degree difficult. As a result of the relatively high levels of learning support enjoyed at NSFC the lack of support came as a real shock to the 'receivers'.

Ade justifies her lack of academic success in her first year at university as she was "distracted by romance" when she fell in love. She describes being unable to cope with the demands of her degree course and her conflictual relationship with her mother. This led her to spend a lot of time with her boy friend. As a result she did not work hard enough and had to take six re-sits. She failed two of these and had to re-do her entire first year. She blames no-one but herself for this "you have to do a lot of reading and I didn't realise that until it was too late". This spectacular failure at the end of her first year and a year repeated was a painful lesson. She describes how she was shocked into working much harder for the remainder of her degree. Material factors also played their part. She had to work in a supermarket to support herself which meant leaving lectures early. She

also found the culture of higher education especially the lack of support from other students very difficult –

*The people I hung around with they're not willing to help you out, they are willing to be your friend, to party all night long, but when it comes to education you are basically on your own.*

(Interview: Ade, September, 1994)

She found higher education was just “one drag after another.” Finding the tutors very unsympathetic, for example, when she asked for feedback on an essay she got “what do you expect an A?” and “improve your English or else!” on another which she found very upsetting. She hated the feelings of isolation -

*There was so many grown-up people about that were so much older than me, mature students, the atmosphere was different. We were left on our own to get on with things. There were no lecturers on your back telling you to hand in work. So if you are not responsible you slide a bit.*

(Interview: Ade, September, 1994)

Here Ade positions herself as a “child amongst the grown-ups” indicating that she found it hard moving to what she perceived as the adult and responsible world of higher education without tutors to watch over you. She felt a support group for Law students would have been an excellent idea but she did not have the confidence to set one up. She achieved a 2:2 in Law that took her 4 years to complete.

As a single mother with two jobs trying to survive on a modular degree course, Lisa found higher education difficult. “I’ve enjoyed parts of it but I don’t fit in between the undergraduates of my age and the mature students.” She was very critical of the lack of support, poor resources “no books what so ever...15 people have got to share.” This made her very angry –

*well you do have a personal tutor but I've never met mine in three years and feedback on essays if it came at all was just one or two lines on the bottom of your essay. They 're not allowed to check over your essay plans before you have done them, getting no help before you hand them in ... and no extensions that's what I find most difficult.*

(Interview: Lisa third year of higher education)

Another aspect of life at university which she found problematic, was what she perceived as the sexist nature of interactions between female students and lecturers –

*I think a lot of the male lecturers are very sexual. I won't say they sexually*



*harass you but there is a lot of eye contact going on, and it's not just me that feels that, it's other women on the course. It's sort of, you know, I'm the male lecturer and you are the female and there is something very sexual about the way they talk to, you. I wouldn't say they are patronising but there is an 'us and them' kind of thing. There's definitely a male power thing going on there.*

(Interview: Lisa third year of higher education)

Lisa's response to "being a university student" was to stick to her own agenda and needs. She did this by taking a very instrumental approach. She describes how she kept her involvement as minimal as possible. She attended only what was necessary, socialising very little with other students and making little use of the facilities. She really regretted that the size (200 students) and the modular structure of the course, made collaboration with other students impossible. This indicates a mismatch between the collaborative culture and levels of support at NSFC and that of higher education-

*AK: But you haven't sort of said to a few students at the place you are in let's get together and support each other and work on things together, like you did at the college?"*

*Lisa: This is how under developed that sort of relationship with other people is, I mean I haven't even been in a position to say that to other people. It's that undeveloped. Yesterday we said it for the first time. I got onto this unit where there is a lot of people and we said we have to support ourselves. We are going to have to, otherwise we aren't going to get the work done. I mean like they're second years, I'm third year. You know we were saying that yesterday in the bar....I'm not shy, I'm not particularly quiet. If I had the opportunity to have done that over the last few years, I would have done. But it's that segregated*

(Interview: Lisa third year of higher education)

Similar findings are reported by West (1997) in his research, reported in Chapter Two, on mature access students –

*'Modular structures can militate against the development of cohesive supportive groups working together over time; as students move between different courses and different people following different programmes of study.'* (West, 1997: 201)

In relation to the lack of support, Lisa was very aware of the pressures on the staff -

*They're just overworked, it's not even blaming them personally - they have got a lot of work on. Their responsibilities are gross – you know what I mean, they can't possibly have one-to-one attention with their students.*

(Interview: Lisa third year of higher education.)

This made her very critical of policies opening up access to higher education where the necessary support was not provided–

*..because I'd say this for this university they've given all this wonderful outreach work so that you get lots and lots of returning students. However the resources and the support are not just there and a lot of people have dropped out because of that....so, I think it is a wonderful idea, I think anyone is capable of doing a degree with the right support and the right resources. Otherwise forget it, because it will knock people's confidence.*

(Interview : Lisa third year of higher education)

She also referred to the lack of material support. In order to support herself and her daughter, Jade, she had two jobs. She worked in a local community centre twice a week and in a West End night-club on Sunday night. This put her under considerable pressure with her academic studies. However she described all these obstacles that she had overcome as evidence of her determination to succeed– “I’ve managed to get off my feet after being a tart at fifteen.”

She achieved a 2.1 in her degree and an excellent mark for a piece of coursework on the ‘Big Issue’ (a magazine produced and sold by the homeless). Completing her degree took her four years instead of three. She explained that this was because she was a module short of the requirements as she was not aware that the university had changed the regulations. Lisa did well despite her juggling and struggling. Her experiences illustrate the effects of material factors, having to combine work and study in order to support herself and her child. This was combined with the lack of resources to provide learning support, the sheer size of the cohort on her degree course which worked against the development of a collaborative culture and the lack of flexibility over deadlines. Poor communication about the number of modules required meant that she had succeeded against the odds but it had taken her four years. This was in a ‘new’ university with a high percentage of its students from working class homes and drop out rates amongst the highest in the country (Guardian, Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> 1999).

Tim’s agenda was to really enjoy himself “work hard and play hard.” He embraced the social life and especially enjoyed meeting new people and doing athletics and rowing. He describes how he always asked for help from tutors when he needed it.

He also received a lot of financial support from his parents and had good accommodation. Despite these considerable material advantages Tim's post college career can still be described as 'juggling and struggling.' He was juggling and struggling with the academic requirements of his course rather than material demands of being a student. His organisational skills and attitude to his work that let him down. At the end of his second year he failed to do the necessary research for two essays and did not get them in on time. As a result he was required to re-sit the year. He describes how he was half-hearted about his work after this. In his third year he was advised to take time off to do work experience and consider his options. Again on the advice of his tutors he transferred to another course. He finally got a degree (2:2) in the Built Environment. The biographies of the 'receivers' Lisa, Ade, and Tim illustrate the difficulties of students struggling to succeed in higher education. Despite their success at NSFC in another arena they came up against both material and emotional factors which worked against them. West (1997) comments –

The emotionality of change, and the primitive vulnerability of learners in conditions of uncertainty, shape behaviour at all levels, in relationship with teachers, in writing and in the class room. But the process and its impact are rarely considered..... the neglect of the personal and emotional in discussions of teaching in higher education and how these are often focused on subject expertise, technical skill and communicative method rather than relationships and states of being.

(West, 1997: 201)

For Ade and Lisa, their experiences illustrate how their agendas were seriously constrained by struggles over resources in 'new' universities at the local level. Such conditions reflect the pressure to increase numbers rapidly without a corresponding increase in resources. As shown here the lack of resources and individualistic culture of higher education failed to meet the emotional, material and educational needs of these students. The consequences of this could be, as Lisa so eloquently puts it, to reinforce and legitimise failure. Fortunately these three students had the capacity to succeed in getting their degrees against the odds. The extent to which this can be attributed to them being on the HELC is difficult to measure. Both Lisa and Ade indicated that they would not have succeeded without the HELC. However they pointed out a contradiction at the heart of the policy that the course had also made them accustomed to receiving levels of support that were unrealistic in higher education given the resourcing levels.

## 8.6 Graduate employment

When Ade and Lisa left university in 1996 they both found well-paid jobs. By exploiting her social networks, Lisa got a job in an advertising agency as a 'temp' through a contact she met at a party. She was promoted to account handler when she told her boss that the adverts she was working on were 'crap' and that she could do better. He gave her the opportunity to prove herself which she did. As a result was given a permanent job at £16, 000 a year.

Ade realised because her Law degree had taken her four years and was a 2:2 from a 'new' university it was going to be difficult to pursue a career in Law. She had unsuccessfully applied for many jobs and then she saw a vacancy for an accounts assistant. She applied and a friend who did accounts helped her to prepare for the interview. She got the job in August 1996 and by Christmas it had been made permanent and she was given a rise due to her performance and graduate status. She earned £6,000 for a ten-hour week and was being trained as an accountant. She then got another part-time post, using the skills acquired in the first, doing the accounts for a fitness centre. This was another ten-hour a week job for £8,000. Her salary was £16,000 a year for twenty hours a week. She was very pleased with her earnings and felt that she would not have had such opportunities if she had not been a graduate in Law. Tim used contacts of his parents to get work experience in a planning office and hoped that he would be taken on permanently.

These three students stressed the difficulties of finding permanent jobs and how important it was to be strategic and to exploit contacts. They felt that their degrees had given them the edge over non-graduates but that the degrees alone were not sufficient to ensure graduate employment. This corresponds with research findings on graduate employment outlined above.

## 8.7 Rejecters: Mark, Max and Seth

As described in the last chapter these three young men were rejecters. They prioritised other commitments in their lives and as a result failed to get the A level grades necessary

to get into higher education. For Mark it was his football, for Max making money from part-time work and for Seth his music.

Mark's main agenda post college was to become a professional footballer. I have characterised his agenda as 'football, fantasy and fun.' Mark's passion for football had always taken precedence over his academic studies. In the two and a half years after finishing his A levels Mark tried to succeed as a professional footballer. At twenty -two, as he described "that's the age that most people come into first division football," Mark had played professionally for two teams. He had to work in a bar in the evenings to supplement his earnings "it's just like a night-club really, you just have a laugh, it's not really like working." His life evolved around the fantasies of having fun, being a pop star and a footballer as he had also auditioned to sing in a pop group. Asked about his long term plans he felt that –

*"in my late thirties I'll be in a nice hot country, with a beautiful wife, and just relaxing and chilling out".*

(Interview: Mark, January, 1995)

He had one 'good' A level (B grade in Media Studies) but said that he could never imagine himself doing an academic degree at university. He felt becoming a teacher of Physical Education might be a possibility when he was older. This may indicate that his response was not a complete rejection of higher education as he indicated a vocational course was an 'imagined future'.

Max's agenda was much more firmly rooted in enterprise. He had worked in Sainsbury's part-time since he was sixteen and managed to save money while he lived at home. In 1992 he rejected the idea of higher education because he felt he was not ready to make the commitment and his A level grades were poor. When Max did apply to the university of Northside in 1996 it was to do a degree related to retailing called 'Consumer Studies.' This was part of a four year scheme of which an access course, at a further education college in South London, formed the foundation year. Having successfully completed the foundation year Max only stayed for two months as he found the content of the degree unsatisfactory –

*it was really intensive Science and that and I never got on well with Science.....I thought it was more about doing research and finding out more about industry, more related to hotel and catering and stuff like that. (Interview: Max first year of university)*

He felt he did not fit in and so he stayed the minimum amount of time so that his grant would not be jeopardised. His next idea was to apply to a School of Fashion in London. Max had completed two access courses, including the HELC, but his first attempt at a degree course had not provided him with what he needed. This left him to fall back, on the familiar, sometimes exciting but relatively safe world of part time work. By 1997 he had extended his repertoire of enterprise to doing telesales what he called 'cold calling' and working as a Disc Jockey in night-clubs. Max's re-writing of the policy script is not consistent. He is constantly pulled two ways to be 'academic' or 'streetwise' or to reconcile both, and in a sense he succeeded at none of these. His script was a complex appropriation of parts of the policy, of playing very briefly with the idea of higher education rather than staying the course. Despite being a 'rejecter' Seth spent a year re-sitting his A levels and applied to higher education through the clearing system. He got a place at Flatlands Institute of Higher Education to do Media Studies in September 1993 but left at the end of his first year. Seth felt that going to Flatlands College of Higher Education was a mistake. He was very unhappy there because being in the minority as a black student made him feel very isolated and that he did not fit in –

*My main problem was, because I was from London and especially because I was a black guy from London, and there were a lot of mature students ... and it was a feeling of ... I don't know actually how to describe it...they were threatened .....The town itself at that time ... there was a small black community there, but then again, the guys and stuff who were about my age also had this resent thing, because I was from London, they're seen as some kind of threat or something. Not that I went on like I was a threatening person, or anything, but it was kind of, because I was from London, and London does this and London people do that*

(Interview: Seth first year of university)

In sessions at the university if they were doing group work, he described, how he and the other Londoner, always worked together because they felt like "outsiders". These feelings of being an outsider, being regarded as a threat as well as his unease with his lodgings made Seth so unhappy that he became ill -

*I just went haywire...I was getting depressed and all mad thoughts, and I was really getting down, not eating.*

(Interview: Seth first year of university)

After a year and a few months he left Flatlands Institute of Higher Education, but was unable to tell his mother. He then got a job in an art gallery in London. This gave him the space to return to what was his first priority, his music. He won a national rap music talent competition in 1995. Seth describes the sort of music activity he was involved in –

*Actually, what I am is a new breed of entrepreneurial executive/musician. As well as being a performer, I'm writing songs and producing them. I'm also a record company owner.*

(Interview: Seth, June, 1997)

In spite of his entrepreneurial success he did not give up on his academic agenda and as a result of pressure from his mother he re-applied to a 'new' university in London in 1996 to do Media Studies. He left with a 2:1 in Media Studies in 1999. His experiences were much more positive, apart from finding the modular structure of the course very badly organised. He also came into conflict with some lecturers over what constitutes "good art," finding such values underlying the degree course very eurocentric. He describes how "London culture" featured as an important factor in his more positive feelings about his degree course –

*AK: What about the new place? Are there more black people on the course?*

*Seth: Because it's in London, the struggle is more or less the same. You've got black, white, Asian, so that didn't really matter.*

*AK: What do you mean by the struggle's the same?*

*Seth: Well everyone's going through the same social kind of things, but whereas outside London, things are different. Your social reality is different from theirs... but now it's all the same.*

(Interview: Seth, June, 1997)

So for Seth it was not only being with other black students that was so important it was being with students who shared a 'social reality' which was urban, multi-cultural and diverse. However his initial experiences of higher education do indicate factors which might explain why so many black and Asian students prefer to attend universities in inner cities with high ethnic minority populations (Madood and Shiner, 1994). It is interesting

that at universities outside London, Zelda and Lola were regarded as “hip” and “exotic”, (discussed later) while Seth’s ethnicity and sexuality were regarded as threatening. Such misrecognition subjected Seth to gendered cultural and symbolic injustice. Fraser (1997) describes this as injustice rooted in ‘social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication.’ His ‘outsider’ status was partly the result of disparaging, stereotypic, public, cultural representations of young black men. These may have been internalised by the other students on the course and used to prejudge him. At the same time coming from London was a source of status. Other research has indicated the complex reactions of both fear of and attraction to black masculinities from teachers and students, what Gillborn (1990) calls ‘the myth of the black challenge.’ (see also Back; 1994, Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Sewell, 1997)

Seth eventually succeeded in juggling with the dual identities of black entrepreneur and successful black student. He describes how in his academic struggling two factors helped to keep him going. Firstly it was “my Mum probably had a lot to do with it” and also he shared with Lola, Zelda and Kit the concept of ‘raising the race’ (Mirza, 1997) and a commitment to his community –

*Yeah, so it’s all us doing it. We’re trying to build up a foundation where we can be recognised in our community of that guy and that guy ... you know they all came from this place and they all didn’t have to do no drugs and no crime and they’re all getting places, so you know it is positive.*

Interview: Seth June, 1997.

So Seth successfully negotiated the conflicting demands of being a university student on the one hand and his male cultural and entrepreneurial pursuits on the other. Such struggling and juggling involved substantial amounts of time working in the music business. This contributed to the fact that it took Seth much longer to succeed with two attempts at degrees in higher education.

### **8.7.1 Alternative Employment: Education and Enterprise**

The biographies of Mark, Max and Seth illustrate the ongoing conflict for them of their academic careers on the one hand and male cultural and entrepreneurial pursuits on the other. Such conflicts had characterised their careers at NSFC and continued post-college.



This conflict was discussed in Chapter Seven and in this context their emphasis on 'doing both' education and enterprise may have paid off. All three had employment experience and networks to fall back on and to provide them with paid work. Seth, as the only graduate, always had employment through his music even if it was not graduate employment. He emphasised that just having the piece of paper and higher education experience was not sufficient-

*A lot of it depends on ... some of it depends on who you know, it is a help ... but saying that, I came in and didn't know anybody, so how you put yourself about and how willing you are to be in people's faces and how willing you are to go where others don't go and to push yourself that little bit further.... it's one of those, it's a dog eat dog world, but you've got to be a hungry dog really!*

(Interview: Seth, June, 1997)

The experiences of Mark, Max and Seths' entrepreneurial pursuits like telesales, working in a rap band, in bars, cafes and night clubs had provided them with some of the flexible and transferable skills valued by employers and necessary to gain employment in an urban setting.

### **8.8 Recreators: Kit, Lola , Zelda , Denise and Eleni**

In the context of practice the recreators were the largest group of students. They actively and selectively appropriated parts of the policy to meet their own needs. As with the receivers, once in higher education and employment, their room for manoeuvre was severely constrained. Of these students only Kit and Eleni went straight from NSFC to higher education, Lola had to re-sit her A levels and Zelda took a year out to work on a black London newspaper. However having started their degrees, Kit, Lola and Zelda succeeded in getting them within the required three years. They are examples of the success of the access policy in terms that would be recognised by the teachers as the initial policy makers. There was a fit between the outcomes of higher education for these three students and the policy intentions of the HELC. For this reason I have described their response in this context as 'doing the right thing.' However even for them, the process of getting a degree in higher education, described below, was not straightforward and unproblematic.

Denise had recreated the policy to use her qualifications to enrol on a nursery nurses' course in a further education college. Eleni also a recreator had applied to do Media Studies in a College of Higher. She left the course after a year and then applied to do the same NNEB course as Denise. In this context I have called their response 'doing otherwise,' as they rejected the access opportunities in higher education in favour of vocational courses and then employment.

### **8.8.1 Kit, Lola and Zelda: 'Doing the Right Thing'**

Kit, Lola and Zelda are examples of the success of access policies like the HELC. They had all been 'written off' in their secondary schools and considered not capable of doing A levels. They described their delight at the amazement expressed when they met their old teachers in shops and in the street and told them they were at university. Zelda achieved a 2:1 and Kit and Lola 2:2s. Zelda and Kit studied at 'old' universities, the former on the south coast and the latter in London and Lola went to a 'new' university in the midlands. Their main agendas were to use the opportunities to study in higher education to get good jobs in the media at the end of it. Lola had specifically chosen her degree because it ensured employment in the media on successful completion. Despite what I have described as 'doing the right thing,' the process of getting a degree was not an entirely positive experience for them. They too were involved in some struggling and juggling. All three of these young black women described how intimidating they found their courses and the other students. They were in the minority, most other students, being white and middle class and whose response to having black, female students on their courses was complex and gendered. For Lola and Zelda coming from London and being black and female meant that they were regarded as 'exotic other' and 'hip.' –

*Zelda: Yeah, you're 'down' if you're black and you've come from London*

*AK: What does that mean?*

*Zelda: You're hip, you're trendy.*

(Interview: Zelda, March, 1995)

Lola describes the process of 'exotic othering' that took place-

*"Yeah the other students are middle class. They came from places like Shropshire, Oxford, Cardiff and they think they are better than you. But at the same time, they all took a long time to get to know me, because they treated me like I was something special, a lot of them said they'd never had contact*

*with a black person before, so it was 'really amazing' to have a black person in their class and they were asking me.... What sort of things am I into, and what do I eat, and where do I come from. So it was nice telling them I'm not from Mars or the moon. When you say you're from London everyone sticks to you like glue, like London is this exotic" .*

(Interview: Lola, Sept, 1994)

The courses they were following being Sociology and Communications and Media Studies dealt with 'race' and racism as part of the course content. Zelda gives an example of how discussions of 'race', racism and nation were often badly handled in lectures and seminars, making it uncomfortable for her. She objected to the assumption that when 'race' was discussed she was expected to be the expert –

*"I'd be the only black person in the classroom and maybe when I first got there, maybe because I felt intimidated and sometimes it made me feel paranoid, they might be asking a question about 'race' in the class, talking about race and nation ...so everyone was constantly stepping on egg shells rather than say ...express their opinion.... they'd rather say something that they thought wouldn't offend me, they would offend me anyway because they had no idea and it just made me resent being there, so at that stage I wanted to leave, because I felt like.....and everyone, in those kind of classes, everyone would turn to me and say, oh so what do you think about that, when you might be talking about post modernism and no-one would be interested in what my opinion at that stage would be, but because its 'race' and nation, everyone wants to know what I think."*

(Group interview: Zelda, March, 1997)

Kit also felt marginalised in her group as if her opinions were not valued -

*".....I remember the first term of the first year, I was in a tutorial, with four or five other people and they were all white and I don't know whether I was being paranoid or something, but I just felt that no-one was listening to what I had to say. I felt ignored. I went and spoke to my tutor about it and he said if you don't feel comfortable in that class I can move you to another class .....since then I've felt a lot better . But that was one of the experiences that really put me off."*

(Interview: Kit, second year of university)

She was much less positive about university than Zelda and Lola. Kit described how 'she hated it, she hated the course, she hated the people.' She lived at home but on the opposite side of London from the university and felt really isolated as the only black person on the course. Other students lived together on campus so they got to know each other really well. Her greatest disappointment was that she found the lectures so tedious.

They compared very unfavourably with her experiences of learning at NSFC. She describes how boring her time at university was -

*These people they have been lecturing year in, year out, the same subjects, they're just repeating the same things, no interest, no enthusiasm! The last set we did the making of the modern world, it was about capitalism, we did about fascism, nationalism, that sort of stuff. It's not that it doesn't appeal to me it's the way they teach the course. They make it so dull and uninteresting .....it's not stimulating ....it doesn't stimulate a discussion, a question, thoughts. The fact that I am I am not really enjoying it makes it a big struggle to get the work done.*

(Interview: Kit, second year of university)

These three students described how they overcame these feelings of intimidation and how to “just get up there and do it confidently”. Lola and Zelda emphasised how much they enjoyed the practical nature of their courses, with the emphasis on skills-based learning, for example, how to run a radio or television studio. They had to learn to work with other students to pull together to pool expertise and meet deadlines. Lola described that it was also very competitive and intimidating, with some people having good contacts for journalism assignments but being reluctant to share them. There was also some impatience with those who had come with minimal prior experience, Lola describes this – “half of them already think they're journalists, they think they are too big to talk to anyone else, but I can deal with it”. She felt that in the ‘real world’ she would be working with people from all walks of life and her course was good preparation for this. She felt the HELC had helped her to see “that she just had to get on with it,” and to think strategically about how she could do this.

What is interesting about these three successful black female students is how they subverted notions that they were not supposed to be in higher education, that they were ‘matter out of place’ regarded as dangerous and polluting (Douglas, 1966). Despite the rhetoric of equality and empowerment that accompanied strategies to improve access to higher education students like Lola, Zelda and Kit felt strongly about the ‘exotic othering’ and elitism they faced. This is evident in the quotes above. Ironically these obstacles made them more determined and allowed them a creative reading of the policy script which made it ‘their own’. They were not conforming or accepting uncritically the possible upward social mobility that higher education offered. For them their ‘race’ and the concept of ‘raising the race’ actually helped them to keep going when the going

got tough. Lola expresses this well –

*Yeah I was really close to one Asian girl on our course and I kept telling her ... I'm going to drop out, I'm going to drop out, and she said to me, no you can't ... you belong here, you're representing your people sort of thing and if you drop out, it is going reinforce stereotypes that black people are lazy, don't want to do no work and you know ...junked out and stuff. Well I'm going to have to do my part to change this image that it is just for middle class white people.*

(Group interview: Lola, March, 1997)

Mirza (1997) analyses young black womens' educational success and considers the theoretical explanations offered. She rejects an analysis which positions such success as 'resistance through accommodation' Mac an Ghaill (1988) in favour of –

being successful and gaining authority and power within institutions that have traditionally not allowed black women formal authority or real power enables them to indirectly subvert oppressive structures by changing them.

(Mirza,1997: 276)

Mirza sees such success and the desire for inclusion as 'strategic, subversive and ultimately transformative,' in refusing what young black women are defined as, they are undermining racist expectations and beliefs. On the surface it looked as if Zelda, Lola and Kit were 'buying into the system,' conforming and accepting the ideology of meritocracy. However it could also be argued that they subverted this incorporation by their commitment to their communities. Part of this was to challenge and change racist and sexist assumptions about who should be in higher education. Their determination not to be seen to fail was part of their counter discourse, to re-define the world with different codes and values. As Mirza (1994) illustrates with a quote from a black woman university student –

When not given success we need to be successful...that is the most radical thing you can do.

(Alisha in Mirza 1994: 276)

In a similar way these three students were responding actively and creatively. This is what Fraser (1997) would term overcoming demeaning 'misrecognition' as young black women in higher education. Their bivalent positioning resulting from their race and gender, created a recognition-redistribution dilemma. On the one hand they wished to be treated in the same ways as other students, on the other it was important to emphasise their difference. Recognising such difference was important so that specific support could

be provided for black students to enable a collective response to such experiences. Both Zelda and Lola described how important it was to have Black support groups -

*I've joined the African Caribbean Society and that gives me support in relation to when I'm having a hard time. And you just get to mix with other black people, sometimes and we go out, we arrange sporting events and we go to clubs, or we just go to see each other, help each other, that's been very supportive in my first year as well.*

(Interview: Lola, second year of university)

This indicates that an individual response was insufficient in subverting discourses of misrecognition which positioned these students as 'other'. Bird (1996) has emphasised the importance of black support groups in higher education to counter higher drop out rates amongst black students. In his research at two universities, he found the evaluation of the support groups to be predominantly positive. They can provide a number of things – 'support if things go wrong, a safe space to discuss black issues; a pressure group for, for example, curriculum change.' (Bird, 1996: 83)

So despite finding higher education an intimidating environment these three students were successful in terms of the intentions of the policy makers. Their response was not just a passive acceptance of the policy aimed at opening up opportunities for study in higher education. It was an attempt to prove wrong all those who positioned them as failures, including some of their secondary school teachers and fellow students. It was important for them to demonstrate that, in Lola's words "Well I'm going to have to do my part to change this image that it (higher education) is just for middle class, white people." Their responses indicate that they successfully challenged their misrecognition by being successful higher education students.

### **8.8.2 Graduate Employment?**

The risk of taking media degrees did not pay off for Lola and Kit. Lola spent several years after leaving university working as a 'temp' doing office work. She felt that perhaps she was rather naive about how difficult it is to get a job in the media. As a well qualified, black woman she assumed she stood a good chance of getting work in television. It turned out to be much more competitive than she thought. She was quite

depressed by this state of affairs and hated the temping job she was doing. She felt she had really let her parents down, who were initially very proud of her when she graduated, but this had turned to disappointment. She was angry with them for not understanding the intense competition she faced. Only five out of the thirty students on her course had jobs in the media and two of these had parents who worked in the media. Eventually after a succession of temp jobs Lola got employment as an advertising planner at a north London newspaper. This is far from the prestigious magazines, *Reportage* and *Black Beauty* that were part of her 'imagined future' as described when she was a student at NSFC. However she is enjoying the job and feels it promises a lot for future prospects.

Having 'done the right thing' at university Kit chose to 'do otherwise' and reject her graduate status when it came to employment. She is working in a gospel choir and as a session musician. She explained that not using her degree at this point in her career brought her no regrets as she felt being a graduate had not given her any happiness. Her gospel singing was part of her vocation to spread the religion she believed so strongly in.

Zelda had been more successful. Her periods of unpaid work experience had resulted in well paid, though short-term, media jobs, for example, as events assistant at the Television Exhibition and as a steward at the Edinburgh Television Festival. She felt strongly that Media Studies was regarded as a 'Mickey Mouse' degree by a lot of employers. However she thought that if she had chosen another degree she might not have completed it because it was the love of Media Studies that kept her going. Zelda had also worked out a plan for further study. She was saving money to support herself through a Masters in Film Studies at the University of New York. She said that she had become more interested in film because she had met people in small film production groups and that made it seem less of a closed industry.

The experiences of Lola and Zelda raise issues about overcoming barriers only to find new ones erected. Their material conditions did not allow them to do unpaid work experience in order to get entrees into this competitive world. The networks they thought

they could depend on had failed to materialise sufficiently to get them continuous paid work. Their experiences confirm the research findings summarised above (Nove, Snape and Chetwynd, 1999), that graduates are as likely to be in non-graduate jobs as graduate jobs with only a minority gaining employment that directly utilises the academic content of their degrees. This was also a problem of vocational degrees.

### **8.9 Denise and Eleni: Doing Otherwise**

In the context of practice Denise had chosen further education rather than higher education and Eleni had chosen a Media Studies degree rather than those on offer as part of the access arrangements of the scheme. Both chose vocational training, though for Eleni, this was after one year in higher education. It is interesting that the two young women chose to train for the stereotypical female occupation of nursery nurse.

Denise chose a nursery nurses' course as she could "relate to it and understand it more, unlike Business Studies at A/S level which she found really difficult". Denise's own agenda involved a change from an academic to a vocational route. She preferred the further education college to NSFC but felt that 'the two years at NSFC helped me a great deal, especially the extra support from tutors.' She rejected the opportunities to study higher education, one of the policy intentions of the scheme. She wanted a course that would enable her to get a good job and earn some money, rather than the long period of dependency that higher education would involve. Her parents, concerned about the financial implications, were not keen for her to go to university and thought that being a nursery nurse was a much more appropriate career for a young woman. The NNEB course was local. Denise could continue to live at home. Her course consisted of a small group of nineteen students, all women. The teaching was supportive and interactive. Initially when Denise started the HELC she had planned to do a teacher training course. She felt that this might still be a possibility at a later stage in her life.

Eleni, encouraged by her teachers, took a place to do Media Studies in a college of higher education in Surrey. She hated it because she felt she did not fit in -

*they were all art students and you know all sort of hippified and 'real' students." "All sitting down on the floor, all DMs, smoking pot or smoking something, lager in their hands and all talking artified (Interview: Eleni, September, 1999)*



This quote indicates the assumptions Eleni carried with her about what constitutes a 'real student' and how she was unable to identify with this. The only students she felt she could relate to were African-Caribbean students who commuted from London. She found the course content difficult. It was very different from the practical work she had enjoyed in A level Media Studies and Photography. Psychoanalysis, postmodernism and architecture were far too intellectual and abstract for her, she felt. She found the area and college a very 'alien culture.' She did not like most of the other students and found the staff middle class and intimidating. Eleni described her first year in higher education as "the worst year of my life". The cultural capital she acquired at NSFC did not seem to work for her in another context, as she describes, "I felt totally unconfident about everything, so introvert, I never spoke unless someone said something to me." She missed her family and friends. Her own agenda, in view of the fact that she felt she was not "a real student", was to "drop out" of higher education and apply to the same further education college as Denise in London to do an NNEB course. It was a difficult decision and she felt guilty, "letting her mother down and depriving someone else of a degree place." She was also angry with the teachers at NSFC who had just –

*thought it was automatic that you do your degree, no-one sort of tells you that there are other things you can do like NNEB or diplomas. It's like you are getting commission on how many people you are sending!*

(Interview: Eleni, September, 1999)

Eleni's anger indicates that she thought the teachers had their own educational agendas. They developed the policy on the assumption that higher education was good for everyone without offering proper consideration of alternatives. She loved the NNEB course and did very well on it. She regretted being on the HELC because had she gone straight from school to the further education college "she would have finished it (the NNEB course) two years ago and had a job now." She was also disparaging about the currency of degrees for getting employment and felt that her choice made her a "professional" which was much better than being an unemployed graduate: "there's people coming out with degrees and working in Safeways," she declared.

That Eleni and Denise rejected the opportunity to study in higher education in favour of a vocational course is interesting. The policy had been re-ordered by them, access to higher education rejected in favour of nursery nursing, which is a very gendered choice. It was regarded by them both as a safe and comfortable option providing 'paraprofessional' (Hollands, 1990) employment. Unlike the unqualified or poorly qualified young women in Skeggs' research (1997) for whom there was very little else to do but caring courses at college both Denise and Eleni had A levels and access to higher education. However some of Skeggs' (1997: 59) research offers interesting insights into the possible reasons for their choice. In her research the young women 'celebrated the practical' over the academic in the same way as Denise and Eleni -

a caring self is a practical, not academic self. Their rejection of the academic side of the curriculum is another attempt to find something at which they will not fail. It is a form of investment in themselves

(Skeggs, 1997:59)

Eleni rejected a policy offering her the chance to be what she parodied as an intellectual, cultivated and clever a "real student" of Media Studies in higher education in favour of what she saw as the practical identity of useful, respectable and responsible carer of small children of nursery age. Both Eleni and Denise however expressed an ambiguity about their choices and the desire to keep open the option of teacher training courses for the future. Part of this ambiguity for Eleni was that she thought she might have stayed on the course if it had been in London. Theirs was not a complete rejection of higher education.

### **8.9.1 Alternative Occupations?**

Both Debbie and Eleni found getting employment easy. Debbie applied for two jobs when she completed her training and was offered both. She chose to work at Hockney Day Nursery where she stayed for two years. Then she moved to the Sunshine Nursery much nearer her home. Eleni got a job in Barston nursery because her brother knew the headteacher. The post was not advertised she explained she just had an informal chat, provided references and was offered the job. Denise earns £9,700 and Eleni £12,000. They are both very positive about their work and have no regrets about not being graduates. Eleni rationalises that if she had continued her Media Studies degree she might be working in a supermarket now like so many Media Studies graduates. With their permanent jobs and para-professional status they compare themselves favourably to

the others in this cohort.

## **8.10 Conclusion**

This chapter set out to discover whether students in this cohort of the HELC in their post-college careers continued to re-write the policy text. It therefore focuses on the longer-term effects of their responses at NSFC on their lives in further and higher education and work. It would appear that students had much less room for manoeuvre in higher education than they enjoyed at NSFC. For those who went onto degree courses they found that the HELC had not prepared them for the culture and pedagogies of higher education. The data show that they were all involved to some extent in juggling and struggling with the academic demands of their courses, some with misrecognition associated with being 'non-traditional' students, some with having to combine work and study as well as cope with demands made on them from their lives outside university. In the following and concluding chapter many of the issues raised here especially the policy implications of the experiences of these students will be considered in more detail.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **A Concluding Discussion**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

In undertaking this research I have attempted to extend empirical and theoretical understanding of access education in three main ways. Firstly by researching an access policy designed to meet the needs of 16-19 year old alternative entrants to higher education. Secondly by taking a longer term view of policy effects through a longitudinal case study over seven years of one cohort of students' experiences of the transitions from their access course to higher and further education and employment. Thirdly by applying policy cycle(s) to access education both at a national level as well as focussing down on one access policy.

The research considered the extent to which the HELC could be 'recreated' by the students and teachers as policy producers through the different contexts of the cycle. At a theoretical level the policy cycle approach was developed by combining it with the concept of recognition-redistribution dilemmas (Fraser, 1997) in order to strengthen its explanatory power. This is consistent with what Ball (1994a:14) calls a 'toolbox of diverse concepts and theories'. Combining feminism(s), post-structural and structural approaches to the study of access education allows a contribution to be made to the body of knowledge known as policy sociology.

In this chapter I will summarise the findings of the thesis using key themes that have emerged from the research. These will be briefly discussed. I will consider the policy implications of these findings especially in relation to the fourth episode of access education, 1997 onwards, which has been left until this concluding chapter. This allows reflection forward to consider very briefly the future of access education and the implications of the findings of this thesis for future provision. In addition to an empirical investigation of policy issues one of the aims of this study was to evaluate a policy cycle approach. The limitations of the research will then be discussed as well as questions left unanswered which indicate the need for further research.

## 9.2 Starting Points

The focus of this thesis has been a small access policy designed to open up opportunities for study in higher education to non-traditional A level students. Using my insider knowledge as a teacher at NSFC, as well as interview data and documentary sources, I have tracked the policy cycle of the HELC from the context of text production through the context of practice to the context of outcomes. I have told the story of the teachers who initiated the policy. Using the students' different responses as 'receivers', 'rejecters' and 'recreators', I show how the policy was played out at NSFC as well as the longer-term effects of such responses on their lives in further and higher education and work. My starting point was to consider the extent to which students could re-make this policy according to their own agendas and the extent to which they were constrained. Another central focus was the relationship between the policy intentions of the teachers and the policy effects on the careers of these twelve students. This analysis of student responses sheds some light on the policy and practice of access education on the ground. It is necessary here to re-visit the aims of the research in order to assess the extent to which they have been achieved.

Four aims guided my research and are set out in the chronological order in which I addressed them in the thesis –

- To adapt and develop a policy cycle approach to trace the historical and ideological development of access education nationally from the early 1970s to the late 1990s.
- To examine the development of a small policy initiative particularly the social processes involved in its production and its subsequent fate.
- To explore the relationship between policy intentions and policy effects: in particular how one group of students and teachers involved 'made' and 're-made' the policy in each context of the policy cycle according to their own agendas and biographies.

- To consider the implications of this research for contemporary developments in access education and policy sociology

In the next section I will briefly discuss the extent to which these aims have been achieved. I will begin by considering aim number three: the relationship between the policy intentions of the teachers and the longer-term policy effects.

### **9.3 The Relationship Between Policy Intentions and Policy Effects**

The intentions of the teachers in this case, the local policy initiators, was to protect the interests of mainly working class students. This was done by offering such students the opportunity to enrol on and be supported through A levels and by providing routes into higher education. Of course, the extent to which the HELC has had an impact on these students' lives is difficult to determine with any precision. By 1999 eight out of the twelve students in this cohort had higher education degrees, four of them with 2:1s. The remaining four found alternative 'careers'. All of these four might at some point in their lives succeed in higher education, though from the data presented here, they would be likely to choose vocational teacher training courses. Discussing these outcomes as 'success' or 'failure' seems inappropriate in the policy cycle framework. Failure to achieve a degree cannot be seen as failure but merely reading from a different script. For those who did get degrees the process was far from straightforward and unproblematic and a degree in itself was also not a passport to graduate employment.

Several issues emerge from the experiences of this cohort that will be discussed here. However the policy implications will be dealt with more fully in the next section. Firstly for all those students who did go into higher education their agendas were severely constrained. This brings into play Ball's (1994a) notion of policy as text and policy as discourse. At NSFC students had more opportunities to selectively recreate the text to their own needs or agendas. Once in higher education such spaces appear to have been closed down or reduced for all the students, but especially for those that can be characterised as 'jugglers' and 'strugglers.' The students' biographies demonstrate that the choices they did make were made within limits and that these limits were constrained or patterned. Ball (1994a) uses a Foucauldian concept of power and from this perspective he acknowledges that 'policy texts enter rather than simply change power relations'.

Existing power relations in other contexts, in particular, the context of influence, impacted on this context of outcomes. This was not just at the level of ideas or discourses but such changes also had a material or structural impact. Here I argue that the extent to which access education enabled these 'different students' to do 'different things' was constrained by both cultural and structural factors. Such constraints, as well as the possibilities and successes, are obvious from students' biographies and will be summarised here.

The social justice and empowerment discourses of widening access to higher education have been reconfigured as a result of legislative changes implemented by central government. Such changes coincided with the entry of this cohort into higher education and this is the pre-existing terrain on which these biographies are played out. The effects of such institutional reconfiguration especially in the 'new' universities are apparent in the students' stories. Opening the doors of universities to new and different students challenges assumptions about who higher education is for. The black students, especially those attending universities outside London, had to constantly challenge the discourses of misrecognition. These were assumptions that as young black students in higher education they were 'matter out of place.' It meant that they navigated the contradictory experiences of being ignored or regarded as an 'expert'; revered and feared; exoticised and patronised. Ironically such experiences made these students even more determined to succeed and in so doing, to undermine demeaning stereotypes about what young black people are. To survive such misrecognition required a collective response and the support of black student groups or a 'shared social reality'. It was only when Seth had access to this in a 'new' university in London that he was able to succeed. Again this raises the concept of a recognition-redistribution dilemma (Fraser, 1997). For while extra resources were required to provide such support for black students they wanted to be treated in the same way as other students. This raises issues, touched on in Chapter Two, about what Jary (2001) calls 'perverse access' where non-traditional students are concentrated in the 'new' universities in urban areas. For black students this ensures on the one hand the presence of other black students but, on the other, that resourcing levels are low and retention rates are poor (Carvel, 1999). It also means that the 'old' universities can continue to recruit mainly white, middle class students who often encounter better funding levels and higher retention rates.

For all the higher education students in this cohort there seemed to be a lack of confidence about their right to be in higher education. This is illustrated most clearly by Eleni's experience and the disparaging way in which she spoke about her interactions with middle class 'real students'. In terms of providing access education it raises issues about how the kind of cultural capital gained in one context, NSFC, cannot necessarily be exchanged for the kind of cultural capital in another. The students in this cohort do not seem to be as robustly confident as the access students described by Green and Webb (1997) in Chapter Two. Such mature students seemed to accept their positioning as abnormal and illegitimate entrants to higher education but recognised that this positioning was a result of deficiencies in the system rather than themselves. They felt that they had a right to such access in the interests of equity. This knowledge and understanding of structural inequalities has traditionally been discussed with students as part of the access educational process. Though this cohort had such knowledge through studying educational under-achievement in their Social Science A level subjects and through discussions in the support sessions this did not seem to always help them at an individual or emotional level.

Another issue was highlighted by the experiences of the four students who rejected higher education. This was that alternatives to higher education had not been adequately explored on the HELC. This was one of the silences of the policy process discussed in Chapter Six. Teachers felt that they had not considered the opportunities other professions and alternative qualifications offered students. There was pressure to maximise the number of university entrants in the college. This may have led some teachers to adhere to their own cultural assumptions rather than to think carefully about what might be in the best interests of students or to provide such viable alternative routes into employment. On the other hand, dissuading students from a choice of higher education as inappropriate might be regarded by them as patronising and elitist. This is one of the key dilemmas for teachers engaged in advising students about higher education but most acutely for those involved in access education.

For, the 'strugglers' and 'jugglers' their success was to get a degree, against the odds, without the learning support and conditions necessary to make this a straightforward and unproblematic process. Their stories highlight the mismatch between the levels of support and learning cultures of NSFC and in higher education. Lisa felt



particularly strongly about this mismatch. Providing access to higher education for non-traditional students and then not providing them with the learning support necessary to succeed could be regarded as reinforcing failure. For those students attending inner city 'new' universities which had more than their fair share of non-traditional students brought them up against the realities of marketisation and massification. The entry of this cohort to higher education in 1992 coincided with radical changes to higher education, in particular an increase in numbers and new funding and quality assurance arrangements. The participation rate set at 35% (Scott, 1995) was achieved without a corresponding increase in resources with the aim of obtaining better value for money. Funding levels per student have fallen by 40% between 1976 and 1997 (Carvel, 1997:4; The Guardian). Such pressures have led universities to increase their intake. The effects of this are to reduce resources for learning support and to increase the workloads of academics. Such conditions in higher education are highlighted in the stories of the 'jugglers' and 'strugglers.' They had become accustomed to high levels of learning support from their tutors on the HELC. Additionally, the higher education structures they encountered as well as the learning culture and pedagogies employed, worked against them using the collaborative skills they had learnt at NSFC. This relates to the relationship between 'access to higher education' and the changes that are necessary to make such institutions 'accessible' to more and different students like those in this cohort (Leicester, 1993). As discussed in Chapter One and Two both '*access*' and '*accessibility*' are necessary to the success of widening participation.

Another structural constraint which emerges from students' stories of life in higher education was their poverty. They all, with the exception of Tim, had to work long hours to support themselves. The pressures on them to cope with the academic demands of their courses were compounded by also being poor and having to juggle part-time employment and full-time study. Not only did their entry to higher education correspond with government attempts to widen participation in higher education, but also with the introduction of a culture of self-finance. Since the late 1980s the right to mandatory grants for tuition fees and maintenance has been eroded. In 1990s the maintenance grant was frozen and then reduced by 10% a year to be replaced by student loans and an access fund. Such financial constraints resulted in these students juggling and struggling with supporting themselves financially and dealing with the demands of

study at degree level.

Whether their experiences of the HELC and higher education led to improved opportunities in the labour market is also an interesting question. Their experiences of finding work and keeping work touched on briefly here indicate some support for factors other than academic qualifications being crucial in finding graduate work. While there is no generally accepted definition of what constitutes a graduate job, Nove, Snape and Chetwynd (1997) used as one of their proxy measures that the degree was necessary to get the job. Table 1 in Chapter Eight outlines the occupations of students when interviewed between 1997 and 1999. According to this definition none of the students had graduate jobs. The middle class students, found it easier to exploit social networks than the others and to find jobs that were stepping stones to graduate jobs. Ade proved to be able to use the qualifications she did gain very strategically and she felt that her degree had made a difference. Seth, Kit and Max had their own 'alternative' social networks which ensured some employment in the music industry. Denise and Eleni were the most secure in their 'para-professional' roles. They were the least likely to face redundancy or short-term contracts. Mark may find it hard to sustain work as professional footballer and is most likely to want to gain further vocational qualifications. Lola, after a long struggle did find employment with a newspaper but of lower status than she had imagined.

The radical, re-structuring of higher education as well as such changes in the labour market are the terrain in which the biographies of the students should be read and understood. Their biographies indicate that in the new marketised system of higher education their discontent seems to stem not from unsatisfied customers within entitlement culture. They are young men and women aggrieved by their sense of dislocation and having to make it work on their own against their cultural deficit legacy and their 'difference'. Their experiences offer an insight into the cultural and structural factors that impinged on their choices and opportunities in their careers post-college.

Having outlined the relationship between policy intentions and policy effects I will now move on to one of the other aims of the study. This was to consider the social processes involved in the development of this access policy. As outlined in Chapter Three the policy cycle model provides a useful framework for studying the 'how' of policy making but is perhaps less efficient at providing explanations of 'why' events happened as they did. The next section of this chapter takes as its focus the social processes

involved.

#### **9.4 The Social Processes Involved in the Production and the Fate of the HELC**

A re-occurring theme in this research is that there is a dilemma at the heart of this access policy. This emerges from the teachers' stories told in Chapter Six and the stories of the students in Chapters Seven and Eight. The policy involved emphasising the 'difference' of students in order to make a case for extra resources but the process of doing so may have disadvantaged them further. The intentions of the teachers at NSFC were to protect the interests of mainly working class students from schools in the local borough. Such students did not have the required GCSEs to enrol on A level courses. In order to provide the resources for learning support to enable them to succeed at A level and progress onto higher education, a case for their educational disadvantage had to be made. Chapter Six includes accounts of the teachers' unease at labelling such students as 'disadvantaged.' It provides examples of how students wished to be regarded in the same way as other students in their applications to university and when their course was described in the local press. At the same time they recognised that they needed the learning support offered by the course in order to succeed. Chapter Seven provides evidence of how students, particularly two young black male students found the HELC stigmatising. In Chapter Eight students' experiences as 'non-traditional' students in higher education also resulted in them being subjected to misrecognition. Drawing on Fraser's (1997) framework for analysing different oppressions and understanding injustices was very useful here. The students in this cohort were facing recognition-redistribution dilemmas. These were unavoidable in policies where in the absence of resources for all targeting of some students for extra support is necessary. As an affirmative strategy the HELC did not challenge or change the underlying generative framework of educational inequality. Additionally the resources provided to make up for the students' former disadvantage were not sufficient to compensate. When students got lower than predicted grades at A level this could be seen to reinforce failure further. They received extra help and still failed, this could be used to indicate deficiencies in the students themselves. When they failed examinations, or to get their work in on time or struggled with the academic requirements of degree courses, this could reinforce the notion that they should not be in higher education in the first place.

Chapter Six also provides some findings related to the ability of teachers like those at NSFC to sustain this access policy over time. The demise of the HELC in 1995 was the result of a number of factors. Changes in the context of influence, in particular the incorporation of sixth form colleges followed by the introduction a new stringent funding mechanisms through the FEFC made it difficult to continue the HELC without the more generous funding regime that had spawned it. Massification had also rendered special arrangements redundant whereas the squeeze on resources in higher education had made the learning support aspect more necessary. However the demise of the course was a result of more than just changes in funding. The teachers interviewed indicated that the students enrolling on the course were more instrumental and individualistic or 'Thatchers' children', as one teacher called them. There was also what was described 'as a sort of accumulated fatigue,' that made it difficult for teachers to sustain a policy in the mid-1990s when their working conditions had worsened, the pace of educational innovation had speeded up and the space for such radical schemes had closed down.

Having summarised the main findings of this research it is possible to make some policy recommendations from the experiences of this cohort of students. The following section will outline these briefly and use them as a basis of interrogating key features of access education in the final episode 1997 onwards.

## **9.5 Policy Recommendations**

Policy recommendations will be made briefly in this section and then used to frame the final episode of access education from 1997 onwards to consider the possibility of them being implemented. Four clear areas emerge from this research to form the basis of policy recommendations. These are –

- Improving the funding for students in higher education.
- Changing the culture and pedagogy of higher education to become more collaborative, active and student-centred to ensure 'accessibility' as well as 'access'.
- Increasing and widening access to the elite sector of higher education in order to avoid the 'social exclusion model' (Woodrow, 2000) with 'disadvantaged' students concentrated in the new universities as described in Chapter Two and Chapter Eight with poorer funding and retention rates.

- More flexibility in the FEFC funding framework to ensure that access education continues to provide 'a second chance to learn' for marginalised groups.

Making policy recommendations is no easy matter as it means a choice between what is desirable and what is possible. It contains the dilemma of either recommending the provision of an equitable and well-funded educational system with mandatory grants for all those who wish to study in higher education, which may be too expensive in a mass system, or targeting 'disadvantaged' students for special treatment. One of the strong and re-occurring themes of this research was that targeting students for special treatment and therefore emphasising their 'difference' was stigmatising. The dilemma is that in the absence of funding for all targeting is necessary but stigmatising. Fraser (1997) addresses the problem of attempting to pursue redistribution and recognition simultaneously by suggesting two approaches to remedying injustice: affirmation and transformation. In relation to access education affirmation involves correcting the inequitable outcomes of those who were disadvantaged in compulsory education without changing the underlying class society that generated such inequalities. This could be achieved in the way Woodrow (2000) suggests as the social inclusion model –

This tilts the balance of expenditure significantly, from the most to the least affluent groups, with student support in inverse proportion to ability to pay. Resources boosted by increased government spending and contributions from higher income groups, prioritise quality and equality in all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The sector will then be renowned, not for reflecting and reproducing inequalities in society, but providing a higher education which is of benefit to all, and to which no income group has a greater claim than any other.

(Woodrow, 2000: 3)

However this solution does not avoid Fraser's point that affirmative strategies aimed at redistribution tend to emphasise social differentiation and can cause backlash misrecognition. While Woodrow does not spell out the mechanisms of a social inclusion model from the experiences of the students in this research targeting funds may disadvantage them further.

Transformation, on the other hand, is aimed at a much more fundamental restructuring of the underlying generative framework. For seven of the students in this study their disadvantage was the result of, amongst other factors, their gender and their 'race' both of which are bivalent collectivities resulting from both cultural and economic

injustice. What are required are solutions which combine transformative redistribution with transformative recognition through socialism in the economy and deconstruction in the culture. Fraser recommends coalition building to overcome what she describes as 'the multiplication of social antagonisms, the fissuring of social movements and the growing appeal of the right' (p.32). In relation to access education part of the original philosophy of early access educators was to transform the whole higher education system from below. Can access education as the radical project for social justice be reclaimed? Does a social inclusion agenda provide the possibility of both fundamental economic restructuring and revaluing cultural diversity? A brief account of the progress of access education and changes to higher education in the fourth episode from 1997 onwards will provide some evidence.

#### **9.6 Fourth Episode: Access Education Within a Social Inclusion Agenda**

The focus of this final episode of access education will be to consider briefly what has changed in the provision of access education and the related wider educational policy arena. Two main discourses characterise the period from 1997–2002. At the level of official government policy the notion of 'access' is now on many influential agendas. In this sense access education can be regarded as a success story. Since the Labour victory in May 1997 the discourses of 'social inclusion' and 'widening participation', 'lifelong learning' and 'the learning age' are at the centre of many governmental initiatives and programmes. At the same time the discourses of access education in the late 1990s have changed to reflect new patterns of provision and progression. Key terms have changed with 'access' replaced by 'widening participation', 'disadvantaged' by 'socially excluded' and disabled students are now part of the access discourse. Over 90% of Access to HE courses are now validated by the National Open College Network (Wilson, 2000). Such developments are symbolised in the change in name of the 'Journal of Access Studies' to the 'Journal of Access and Credit Studies' in 1998. This reflects the fact that credit accumulation and transfer system has become the most important form of accreditation for access students. Wilson (2000: 135) describes how more access students apply for part-time access to HE and in higher education many study for part-time or sub-degree programmes rather than the fulltime degrees that were on offer as part of traditional access courses. He also registers a slight decline in the numbers applying for

access programmes. This may be a result of the removal of maintenance grants and the introduction of tuition fees making it more difficult for 'disadvantaged' students to embark on traditional three year degree course. In instrumental terms the changes in graduate employment and earnings may make such students sceptical of the future returns on their investment in study, especially if they study in 'new' universities. Wilson (2000) welcomes the changes in FEFC funding in 2000 allowing individual units of qualifications to be funded in further education colleges. The former system of inflexible funding contributed to the demise of the HELC in 1995. On the basis of these changes he makes a good case for the kitemarking arrangements, developed in 1986, to be adapted in order to accommodate these changing circumstances.

The key question here is about the relationship between the two sets of discourses outlined above. What do they tell us about the rhetoric and reality of the current situation for disadvantaged groups, like the students in this research, seeking access to higher education?

Reports like Kennedy (1997), Fryer, (1997), Higher Education in the Learning Society (Dearing Report, 1997) and the Learning Age: A renaissance for a new Britain (1998) and the Excellence Challenge (DfEE, 2000), all emphasise the importance of widening participation in education to all groups in society. Such agendas are more sophisticated than former explanations of social exclusion because they recognise the importance of both cultural influences and structural factors like poverty. The Dearing Report (1997) contains some recommendations aimed at increasing both 'access' to higher education and improving the 'accessibility' of the curriculum in recognition that greater numbers of students will come from a broader spectrum of cultural backgrounds and abilities. The Report recommends that universities put in place institutional policies aimed at encouraging and recognising excellence in teaching. This is necessary, it suggests, because an emphasis on research as a result of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) may have deflected attention away from quality in teaching. It also recommends that programmes for teacher training of university staff are introduced and that institutions seek accreditation for such programmes from the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Also included is the recommendation that priority in funding should go to those institutions that can demonstrate a commitment to widening participation.

Since the publication of the Dearing Report in 1997 more recent policy changes indicate a continued commitment by the government to widening participation and lifelong learning. Curriculum 2000 (Qualifying for success, DfEE, 1997) has seen the reform of A levels and vocational qualification (AVCEs) to make them broader, more accessible and flexible. In theory students can now mix academic and vocational modules for their post-16 programme of study. Despite criticisms of Curriculum 2000 (Spours, Savory, and Hodgson, 2000) the post-16 curriculum now on offer is more accessible to students like those in this study with poor GCSEs than the former A level system. The introduction of foundation degrees which are to be completed in two years and allow people to combine paid work and study is another example of the government's agenda of widening participation in higher education. Higher education institutions are being asked by HEFCE to develop 'Institutional Strategies on Widening Participation'. Funding strategy premiums are being extended for recruiting under-represented groups, in addition to those paid for mature and part-time students. New initiatives to promote collaboration between communities and elite universities are being funded by central government through the Excellence Initiative (DfEE, 2000). Finally much more emphasis is to be placed on the monitoring of widening participation especially the collection of data on exactly who are the under-represented groups.

It is not possible to critique all the above policies in great detail. However there is a great deal of scepticism amongst educationalists about whether such policies will result in real change. Such criticisms point to lack of clear definitions of learning or what the learning society might look like (Layer and Smith, 2001:146). Many of new Labour's education policies contain contradictions and lack of coherence, setting up barriers to participation rather than removing them but at the same time talking about social inclusion and equity (Hodgson and Spours, 1999: 27). The discourses of the access movement with an emphasis on both personal and community empowerment appear to have lost out to the discourse of lifelong learning. This draws on human capital theory promoting individualism and privileges the requirements of employers and a global competitive economy (Bailey, 2001; Billing, 1998; Coffield, 1999).

In predicting the future of the access movement, Diamond (1999) considers the past successes of access education; its ability to ward off attacks on standards in the mid-1980s, the development of a pressure group (FAST) and the Journal of Access Studies;



the establishment of access as the third route into higher education; the Open College system. To these I would add the way in which through the 1990s access education has re-invented itself described in Chapter Five by finding new modalities and constituencies. In the process it has become more individualised, less focussed on disadvantaged groups of mature students in favour of providing a 'second chance to learn' for all age groups who missed out in their compulsory schooling. For some students 'access' is being re-defined as 'access to further education,' and that the opportunity to undertake degree level work has to be forfeited so that it does not interfere with job seeking (Burke, 2001).

In considering what the future holds for access programmes and courses Diamond (1999) asserts that access provision may have become too mainstream and needs to return to its radical roots. This may involve looking for new constituencies outside the confines of the formal post-compulsory sector. He suggests that working with community activists in Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) may be an opportunity for access educators to return to their original philosophy -

..it would also require Access practitioners to shift their focus away from the old 'Access equals HE Access' to one that is much more centred on the notion of increased and widened participation. It could mean working with local residents' groups or tenants' groups. It would mean liaising and negotiating with SRB officers and users to develop appropriate programmes for local people.

(Diamond, 1999:190)

Could such work be part of the coalition building which Fraser (1997) recommends? While this call for a new focus for access programmes outside the formal educational system is important, the evidence is that access programmes within the formal system are as necessary now as they have always been. Firstly, this is necessary because there is still an under-representation of students from 'disadvantaged' and lower class backgrounds. Jary (2001) gives the example that in 1997, 80% of young people from social class 1 entered higher education compared to 14% from social class 5. There is also the problem of what he calls 'perverse access' that access by 'non-traditional' students has been disproportionately to the 'least sought after' institutions. Such institutions also have the highest drop-out rates. Figures published for the first time by HEFCE in 1999 show this-

The class divide in education is exposed today in the first official figures showing a yawning gap between the elite universities and newer institutions with a less privileged intake, where one student in three fails to stay the course.

(Carvel, Guardian, December 1999)

This indicates that 'access' as well as 'accessibility' are still very much on the widening participation agenda. While it is easier for students to enter university many still need the study skills and confidence provided through access education to cope with the culture and academic demands of higher education. However there are welcome signs that widening participation is centrally on the government's agenda and that higher education is being encouraged to improve its learning culture (Dearing, 1997; The Excellence Challenge, DfEE, 2000).

### **9.7 Evaluating the Policy Cycle**

Another aim of this project was to evaluate the usefulness of the policy cycle model.

As an approach to policy analysis it has been extremely valuable in many respects. It provided a conceptual framework to study both the development of access education nationally and one case study of an access policy locally. Bowe et al (1992) researched how a centrally prescribed piece of central government legislation like the national curriculum was re-made by teachers in schools according to the micro-politics of their institutions. Conversely, this thesis argues that policies like the various access education schemes initiated in the context of practice in the 1970s and early 1980s have been expropriated by central government and other key players in the context of influence. Such access policies have been recontextualised to meet the needs of political, social and economic agendas, and as outlined in episode four above, this process of policy production continues. This supports the assertion that the policy cycle involves a two-way flow of influence and that policies can be initiated in the context of practice. It is a useful antidote to top-down linear models of policy-making, viewing it rather as a continual process of writing and re-writing. It also allows an active role to teachers and students implicated in policy production. Its emphasis on policy as what is enacted as well as intended provides a thread to trace the fate of a policy in a cyclical and complex way that would not be possible with the pluralist or Marxist approaches reviewed in Chapter Three.

However there are four problems that I have found with the policy cycle approach. The first concerns the different contexts of the policy cycle. Ball's diagram is

potentially misleading. This is because it appears to privilege the context of influence as it is hierarchically at the top of the diagram. The diagram also separates the different

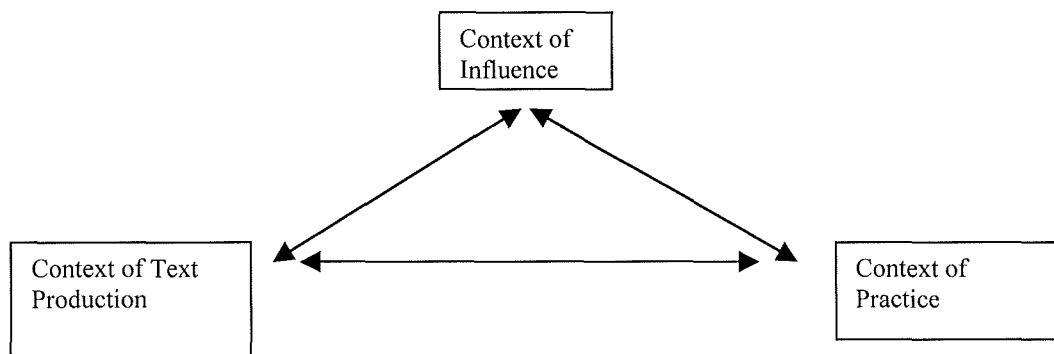


Fig. 1 Contexts of policy making (Source: Bowe, Ball with Gold, 1992:20)

contexts of policy in a way that underplays the cyclical and dynamic nature of policy production. As Ball (1994a) asserts they are not spacially separate but exist in each other. They can be separated out for analytical purposes and that is how I used them in this thesis. It might be worth exploring a diagram would do more justice to the cyclical nature of this approach.

Secondly having a separate context for text production creates some conceptual difficulties. Again this privileges the context of influence and major foundational texts like the national curriculum. The approach asserts that policies can be initiated in any context, which makes a separate context for text production unnecessary. Text production is crucial but the text production of the HELC took place in the context of practice. Ball (1994a) considers the policy cycle approach to be a development of trajectory studies but this again may be contradictory as it implies a beginning and end rather than a cycle.

Thirdly the model concedes too much power to teachers and schools. The fate of this access policy illustrates the unequal power of the context of influence. Massification and marketisation especially the new FEFC funding arrangements closed down the space for teachers like those at NSFC to develop radical policies which required flexibility about the allocation of funds. This thesis illustrates how those spaces were closed down between late 1980s and the mid 1990s. However teachers at NSFC do attribute the demise of the policy to a number of factors like new funding arrangements but also more

localised and institutional factors like innovation fatigue, a new kind of student intake and a less committed staff.

Fourthly, Ball's method enables an engagement with the 'how' and the 'what' but not with the 'why' of policy making. For example use of the concept of policy recontextualisation was useful to study how the policy was re-made in the different contexts and by different policy producers. Why responses occurred when they did, for example, the fact that some students found the HELC stigmatising was only possible with the addition of Fraser's (1999) analytic framework of recognition-redistribution dilemmas. However this could be said to be consistent with Ball's (1994a) approach which encourages the use of a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories.

### **9.8 The Limitations of the Research**

It is an important part of carrying out any research project to reflect on what might have been done differently. This requires a consideration of the limitations of the study.

A very positive aspect of the project was that over the research period my interest in policy sociology developed. This led me to investigate the HELC as a piece of policy production. My initial focus was in the social identities of the students and how these developed and changed over time. I was also interested in the factors that made them decide to enrol on an access course. Taking a policy cycle approach to policy making took me off in a different direction and may have resulted in some sociologically significant factors about students' identities not being explored. For example seven out of the twelve students defined themselves as evangelical Christians. To investigate the importance of this further would have been interesting.

A second limitation was the methods that I used to research access education nationally. I depended upon documentary evidence and secondary sources in order to investigate the national development of access education. If I were to conduct the research again I would interview some of the key figures involved in the development of access education nationally. This could have included some of the key players from the context of influence. For example, civil servants in the Department of Education who could provide insight into the motives behind the letter of invitation (DES, 1978) and the change in the status of access courses in the 1980s. This would have provided a stronger, first hand account of the context of influence. In the context of practice it would have

been useful to interview some of the early access pioneers. However I made a conscious choice to focus on the in-depth experiences of one cohort of access students over time as those under-represented at that point in the existing research on access education. This in itself had limitations. It was a study of teachers' and students' perspectives of one course, in one place and at one time. It was a small sample of students who were heterogeneous in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender and religion. This made generalising about their experiences difficult. The fact that the study was longitudinal taking place over seven years was one of its strengths but also involved some weaknesses. In some of the interviews teachers and students were asked to be retrospective about events which had taken place some time before. Finally the voices of the tutors in higher education were missing. I could have interviewed these tutors who may well have provided a different perspective on the students' stories as the narrative is constructed as very much through their eyes.

## **9.9 Questions for Further Research**

The research possibilities of access education are many and exciting. As indicated in Chapter Two a large-scale quantitative piece of research is necessary to investigate the contribution that access education has made to widening participation since the 1970s. This would present a research challenge as statistics on access students, as described in Chapter Two, have not been kept consistently. A large sample of former access students could be interviewed to discover the longer-term effects of their access education especially their experiences of higher education and their employment opportunities. This study could have had an international dimension to investigate whether access education is a feature of educational system in other countries.

Another large-scale study that needs to be under-taken is to investigate how a wide range of different students and teachers view the culture and pedagogies of higher education and whether these have changed with massification. Such data could provide a basis for further changes to higher education with a view to improving accessibility.

On a much smaller scale it would be interesting to re-visit this cohort of students to discover the more enduring impact of the HELC. This would be an opportunity to ask them to reflect back on their experiences now that they are in their late 20s. It would also be interesting to discover whether any of the four students who rejected higher education

have subsequently entered it.

### 9.10 Closing Comments

At the beginning of this thesis I made a case for access education as a good vantage point from which to observe the whole educational system. The fact that access programmes are necessary tells us about the relative openness or closure and the effectiveness of both the compulsory and post compulsory sectors of education. The stories of the teachers and students in this longitudinal case study have provided some insight into the policy and practice of access education as well as some key issues confronting the whole system. The entry of these students to higher education coincided with massification and marketisation in both the further education and higher education sectors. Such processes influenced the lives of the students and the teachers' ability to sustain the HELC. More recently the discourses of widening participation and inclusive education indicate that 'access' is at the centre of government educational policy. For example there is the stated commitment that by 2010, 50% of young people should have the opportunity to benefit from higher education (The Excellence Challenge, 2000). However, as this study has shown for higher education to be a rewarding and empowering experience for all students, offering 'access' alone, is not sufficient. For this reason access programmes which provide the emotional and academic support necessary to succeed in higher education continue to be important. Lisa in this cohort puts this very eloquently –

*The tutors on the HELC were brilliant and they did not think for one moment that you could not do a degree. They indicated ... it went without saying that I had the brains and the motivation to do it ....which I think just goes to your self-confidence. I personally believe anyone can do a degree given the right circumstances... but at university they went out of their way to encourage parents, single parents, people from ethnic minorities, mature students into that environment and then they couldn't cope with the problems they brought with them. The amount of people that I saw drop out under stress. They were not given any support whatsoever.*

(Interview: Lisa, June, 1997)

In order to continue the radical working class project of the access movement new constituencies of those excluded will need to be identified and catered for. The biggest challenge is the problem that Fraser (1997) identifies and which is supported by evidence

in this study, that is to find remedies that address both recognition and redistribution and change the underlying generative framework which produce such injustices.

## Bibliography

- Access News. (1991). Number 10: June 1991. London: Access Consultancy Services, Polytechnic of North London.
- Aggleton, P. (1987). *Rebels without Cause? Middle class youth and the transition from school to work*. Lewes: The Falmer Press.
- Ainley, P. (1997). Review of West, L. (1997) Adults, Motivation and Higher Education. Beyond Fragments: A biographical analysis. *Journal of Access Studies*, 12 (2), 236-237.
- Ainley, P., & Cohen, P. (1999) *In the Country of the Blind : Youth Studies and Cultural Studies in Britain*. London: Centre for New Ethnicities Research, University of East London.
- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. London: NLB.
- Arnot, M. (1992). Feminism, Education and the New Right. In M. Arnot & L. Barton (Eds.), *Voicing Concerns: Sociological Perspectives on contemporary educational reforms*. Wallingford: Triangle Books.
- Atkinson, P. & Hammersley, M. (1994) Ethnography and Participant Observation. In Denzin & Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Back, L. (1994). The White Negro Revisited. In A. Cornwall & N. Lindisfarne (Eds.), *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*. London: Routledge.
- Bailey, D. (2001). Always With Us ? : Lifelong learning and the Challenge of Social Inclusion. *Journal of Access and Credit Studies*, 3 (1) 62-71.
- Ball, S. J. (1990). *Politics and Policy making in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (1993). What is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Tool Boxes. *Discourse*, 13(2), 10-17.
- Ball, S. J. (1993). *Ethnography in the corridors of power*. Paper presented at the Paper presented at an ESRC Seminar, University of Warwick.
- Ball, S. J. (1994a). *Education Reform: A Critical and post-structuralist approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ball, S. J. (1994b). Some reflections on policy: a brief response to Hatcher and Troyna. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9(2), 171-182.
- Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Macrae, S. (2000). *Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post-16: New Youth, new economies in the global city*. London: Routledge/Falmer.



- Benn, R. (1996). Women and Adult Education. In R. Fieldhouse & et al (Eds.), *A History of Modern British Adult Education*. Leicester: The National Organisation for Adult Learning.
- Benn, R., & Burton, R. (1995). Access and targeting: an exploration of a contradiction. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 14(6), 447-457.
- Benn, R., & Fieldhouse, R. (1991). Adult education to the rescue in Thatcherite Britain. In F. Poggeler & K. Yaron (Eds.), *Adult Education in Crisis Situations*. Jerusalem: Magnes.
- Bernstein, B. (1977). *Class, Codes and Control, Volume 3*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Berryman, S. (1992). The Further Education White paper and the Further Education Bill - where will it leave Access students? *Journal of Access Studies*, 7(1), Spring 1992, 83-94.
- Billing, D.(1998) The Dearing Inquiry into United Kingdom Higher Education and the Role of Lifelong Learning in the Learning Society. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education and Training*.3 (3) 279-296.
- Bird, J. (1996). *Black Students and Higher Education: Rhetoric and Realities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Blair, M., Holland, J., & Sheldon, S. (1995). *Identity and Diversity: Gender and the experience of education*. Buckingham: Multilingual Matters Ltd and the Open University.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.
- Bourner, T., & Hamid, M. (1987). *Entry Qualifications and Degree Performance*. London: CNAA Development Services Publication 10.
- Bowe, R., Ball, S. J., & Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming Education and Changing Schools: Case Studies in Policy Sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Burke,P. (2001) *Accessing education: a feminist post-structuralist ethnography of widening participation*. Unpublished PhD. London Institute of Education.
- Bynner, J., Chisholm, L., & Furlong, A. (Eds.). (1997). *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Capey, J. (1996). *Review of GNVQ Assessment*. London: National Council for Vocational Qualifications.
- Carvel, J. (1997, 19th July). Cash 'threat' to universities. *The Guardian*.
- Carvel, J. (1999, 3rd December). University drop out rates reflect class roots. *The Guardian*.
- CBI. (1989). *Towards a Skills Revolution*. London: CBI.
- Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Ed.). (1981). *Unpopular Education: Schooling and social democracy in England since 1944*. London: Hutchinson.

- Chitty, C. (Ed.). (1991). *Post-16 Education: Studies in Access and Achievement*. London: Kogan Page.
- CIHE. (1987). *Towards A Partnership: Higher Education - Government - Industry*. London: Council for Industry and Higher Education.
- Coffield, F. (ed) (1999) *Why's the Beer Always Stronger up North?: Studies of Lifelong Learning in Europe*. Bristol, The Policy Press.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. (1988). *Universities' Review of Degree Courses and of Entrance Policies in Response to Secondary Curriculum Change and Wider Access: A Progress Report from the CVCP and SCUE*. London: CVCP.
- Connor, B. (1997). *What do graduates do next?* Brighton: Grantham Book Services Ltd/ University of Sussex, Institute of Employment Studies.
- Cornwall, A., & Lindisfarne, N. (Eds.). (1994). *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*. London: Routledge.
- Corrigan, P. (1992). The politics of Access courses in the 1990s. *Journal of Access Studies*, 7(1, Spring 1992), 19-32.
- CVCP, & CNAAB. (1989). *Access Courses to Higher Education: A framework of National Arrangements for recognition (2)*. London: CNAAB.
- Dale, R. (1986) *Perspectives on Policy Making* (Module 1 of E333, Policy-making in Education). Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Dale, R.(1989) *The State and Education Policy*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Darendorf, R. (1990) *Equality and the Modern Economy*. London: Smith Institute.
- David, M. (1996). Choice and Markets in Education: a critique of some texts. *Discourse*, 17(3), 417-423.
- David, M., Davies, J., Edwards, R., Reay, D., & Standing, K. (1997). Choice within Constraints: Mothers and Schooling. *Gender and Education*, 9(4), 397-410.
- Davies, P. and Parry, G. (1993) *Recognising Access: The Formation and Implementation of the National Framework for the Recognition of Access Courses*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Davies, P. (1997). Number crunching: The Discourse of Statistics. In J. Williams (Ed.), *'Negotiating Access to Higher Education': The Discourse of Selectivity and Equity*. Buckingham: Open University Press/SRHE.
- Dearing, R. (1996). *Interim Report on 16-19 Qualifications*. London: School Curriculum Assessment Authority.
- Dearing, R. (1997). *Higher Education in the Learning Society*. London: HMSO.
- Deem, R., & Brehony, K. J. (1994). Why Didn't You Use A Survey to Generalise Your Findings? Methodological Issues in a Multiple Site Case Study of School Governing

- Bodies after the 1988 Education Reform Act. In D. Halpin & B. Troyna (Eds.), *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues*. London: The Falmer Press.
- DES. (1973). *Adult Education: A Plan for Development (The Russell Report)*. London: HMSO.
- DES. (1978). 'Special Courses in Preparation for entry to Higher Education', *Letter to Chief Education Officers*, 2 August 1978.
- DES. (1980). *Education Act 1980*. London: HMSO.
- DES. (1983). *Report by HM Inspectors on the Polytechnic of North London: BSc Sociology, BA Applied Social Studies Courses at the Polytechnic of North London*. London: HMSO.
- DES.(1985) *Academic Validation in Public Sector Higher Education (The Lindop Report)* London: HMSO.
- DES. (1986). *Education Act 1986*. London: HMSO.
- DES. (1987). *Higher Education. Meeting the Challenge*. Cm 114. London: HMSO.
- DES / DfEE. (1988-1992). *Statistical Bulletin*. London: HMSO.
- DES. (1988). *Education Reform Act 1988*. London: HMSO.
- DES. (1991). *Education and training for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. London: HMSO
- DES. (1991). *Higher Education: A New Framework*. London: HMSO.
- DfEE. (1997). *Qualifying for Success: A Consultation paper on the future of Post-16 Qualifications*. London. DfEE.
- DfEE. (1997). *Learning to Succeed - a new framework for post-16 Learning*. London: The Stationary Office Ltd.
- DfEE. (1998). *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain*. London: HMSO.
- DfEE. (2000) *The Excellence Challenge: The Government's Proposals for Widening the Participation of Young People in HE*, London: HMSO.
- Diamond, J. (1999) Access: The year 2000 and beyond- what next? *Journal of Access and Credit Studies*. Summer 1999 183-191.
- Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Dye, T. (1984). *Understanding Public Policy*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Edwards, R. (1991). The politics of meeting learner needs: power, subject, subjection. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 23(1), 85-97.
- Edwards, T., Fitz, J., & Whitty, G. (1989). *The State and Private Education: An Evaluation of the Assisted Places Scheme*. London: The Falmer Press.

- Egerton, M., & Halsey, A. H. (1993). Trends by social class and gender in access to Higher Education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 19(2), 183-196.
- Elias, P. (1999). *Moving On - Graduate Careers three years after graduation*. Warwick: DfEE /Higher Education Careers Service, University of Warwick, Institute of Employment Research.
- Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why Doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59(3), 297-324.
- Elverno, J., Greenwood, D., Martin, A., Mathews, L., Srubel, A., Thomas, I., & W., W. (1997). Participation, Action and Research in the Classroom. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 19(1), 1-51.
- Evans, K., & Furlong, A. (1997). Metaphors of youth transitions: niches, pathways, trajectories or navigations. In J. Bynner & L. Chisholm & A. Furlong (Eds.), *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Fallows, S., & Steven, C. (2000). *Integrating Key Skills in Higher Education: Employability, Transferable Skills, and Learning for Life*. London: Kogan Page.
- Fieldhouse, R. (1996). Historical and Political Context. In R. Fieldhouse & e. al (Eds.), *A History of Modern British Adult Education*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Fieldhouse, R., & et al. (1996). *A History of Modern British Adult Education*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Finegold, D., Keep, E., Miliband, D., Raffe, D., Spours, K., & Young, M. (1990). *A British Baccalaureat: Ending the Division between Education and Training*. London: IPPR.
- Firestone, W. A. (1993). Alternative arguments for generalising from data as applied to qualitative research. *Educational Researcher*, 22(4), 16-23.
- Fitz, J., Halpin, D., & Power, S. (1993). *Grant-Maintained Schools: Education in the market place*. London: Kogan Page.
- Foucault, M. (1981). *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Post Socialist Condition*. London: Routledge.
- Fryer, R. (1997). *Learning for the Twenty-First Century: First Report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning*. London: Stationary Office.
- Gale, T. (1999) Policy Trajectories: treading the discursive path of policy analysis. *Discourse Autumn Vol.20 No.3*. 393-407.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. J., & Bowe, R. (1992). *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. J., & Bowe, R. (1994). Parents, Privilege and the Education Market Place. *Research Papers in Education*, 9(1), 3-31.

- Gewirtz, S., & Ozga, J. (1990). Partnership, pluralism and education policy: A Reassessment. *Journal of Education Policy*, 5(1), 37-48.
- Gewirtz, S., & Ozga, J. (1993). Sex, lies and audiotape: Interviewing the Education Policy Elite. In D. Halpin & B. Troyna (Eds.), *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Gill, R. (1998). Dialogues and differences: Writing, Reflexivity and the Crisis of Representation. In K. Henwood & C. Griffin & A. Phoenix (Eds.), *Standpoints and Differences: Essays in the Practice of Feminist Psychology*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Gillborn, D. (1990). *'Race', Ethnicity and Education, Teaching and Learning in Multi-Ethnic Schools*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.
- Goldthorpe, J. H. (1980). *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Grace, G. (1984). Urban Education: policy science or critical scholarship? In G. Grace (Ed.), *Education and the City*. London: Routledge.
- Grace, G. (1989). Education Policy studies: developments in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 24(1), 87-95.
- Graham, H. (1993). *Hardship and Health in Women's Lives*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Green, A. (1990). *Education and state formation: the rise of education systems in England, France and the U.S.A.* Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Green, M., & Percy, P. (1991). Gender and Access. In C. Chitty (Ed.), *Post-16 Education: Studies in Access and Achievement*. London: Kogan Page.
- Green, P., & Webb, S. (1997). Student Voices: Alternative Routes. In J. Williams (Ed.), *Negotiating Access to Higher Education: The Discourse of Selectivity and Equity*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.
- Guba, E. G. (1990). Subjectivity and Objectivity. In E. W. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*. Columbia University New York: Teachers College Press.
- Halpin, D., Power, S. and Fitz, J. (1992) Opting for self -governance: change and continuity in grant-maintained schools, in L.Ellison, V.Garrett, and T.Simkins (eds) *Implementing Educational Reform: The Early Lessons*. London: Longman.
- Halpin, D., & Troyna, B. (Eds.). (1994). *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Hammersley, M.(1992) *What's wrong with ethnography? Methodological explorations*. London: Routledge.
- Harding, S. (1993). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: what is 'strong objectivity'? In L. Alcoff & E. Potter (Eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies*. London: Routledge.

- Hargreaves, A. (1985). The Micro-Macro Problem in the Sociology of Education. In R. Burgess (Ed.), *Issues in Educational Research*. London: Falmer Press.
- Hatcher, R., & Troyna, B. (1994). 'The Policy Cycle': A Ball by Ball Account. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9(2), 155-170.
- Hawkes, T. (1977). *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Methuen & Co.
- HEFCE (1999) University League Tables quoted by Carvel, J. (1999, 3rd December). University drop out rates reflect class roots. *The Guardian*
- Henry, M. (1993). What is Policy? A Response to Stephen Ball. *Discourse*, 14(1), 102-105.
- Hey, V. (1996). 'A Game of Two Halves' - A Critique of Some Complicities: between hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses concerning marketisation and education. *Discourse*, 17(3), 351-363.
- Higginson Committee. (1988). *Advancing A levels*. London: HMSO.
- Higher Education Statistical Agency. (1996-1997). Higher Education Statistics for the UK 1996 /1997. Cheltenham: HESA.
- Higher Education Statistical Agency. (2000). *Student Enrolments on Higher Education courses at publicly funded Higher Education Institutions for the UK for the academic year 1999/2000*. Cheltenham: HESA.
- Hill Collins, P. (1991). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (1999) *New Labour's Educational Agenda: issues and Policies for Education and Training from 14+*. London: Kogan Page.
- Hodkinson, P., Sparkes, A. C., & Hodkinson, H. (1996). *Triumphs and Tears: Young People, Markets and the Transition from School to Work*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Hogarth, T., Maguire, M., Pitcher, J., Purcell, K., Wilson, R., Dobson, C., & Wilson, L. (1997). *The Participation of Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education: Summary Report, HEFCE Research Series*. London: Institute for Employment Research.
- Hollands , R.G. (1990) *The Long Transition: Class, Culture and Youth Training*. London: Macmillan.
- Holland, J., Blair, M., & Sheldon, S. (Eds.). (1995). *Debates and Issues in Feminist Research and Pedagogy*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hooks, b. (1982). *Ain't I a woman? Black Women and Feminism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Jary, D. (2001). *Access and Widening Participation (Special Supplement to The Guide to Current Higher Education Policy, Development and Research)*. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Institute for Employment Studies. (1997). Annual Graduate Review. Brighton: IES.

- John, G. (1981). *In the Service of Black Youth: A Study of the Political Culture of Youth and Community Work in English Cities*. Leicester: NAYC Publications.
- Kearney, A., & Diamond, J. (1990). Access Courses: A New Orthodoxy? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 14(1), 128-139.
- Kelly, T. (1992). *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain: From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (Eds.). (1992). *The Action Research Planner*. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press.
- Kennedy, H. (1997). *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education*. Coventry: FEFC.
- Kenway, J. (1995). Feminist Theories of the State: To Be or Not to Be? In M. Blair & J. Holland & S. Sheldon (Eds.), *Identity and Diversity: Gender and the Experience of education*. Buckingham: Multilingual Matters Ltd and the Open University.
- Kenway, J., & Epstein, D. (1996). Introduction: the marketisation of school education: feminist studies and perspectives. *Discourse*, 17(3), 301-314.
- Kogan, M. (1975). *Educational Policy – Making*, London, Allen and Unwin.
- Kogan, M. (1978). *The Politics of Educational Change*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Kogan, M. (1983). The case of education. In K. Young (Ed.), *National Interests and Local Government*. London: Heinemann.
- Labour Party. (1989). *Passport to Success*. London: Labour Party.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*. London: Routledge.
- Lather, P. (1995). Feminist Perspectives on Empowering Research Methodologies. In J. Holland & M. Blair & S. Sheldon (Eds.), *Debates and Issues in Feminist Research and Pedagogy*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Layer, G. and Smith, J. (2001-2). Access, equity and the learning society : spin doctor solution or embedding culture change ? *Journal of Access and Credit Studies*. Vol.3 No.2. 143-155
- Leicester, M. (1993). *Race for a Change in Continuing and Higher Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Lieven, M. (1989). Access Courses after Ten Years: A Review. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 43(2), 160-174.
- Lucas, S., & Ward, P. (1983). *A Survey of 'Access' Courses in England*. Lancaster: University of Lancaster.
- Lucas, S., & Ward, P. (1985) *A Survey of 'Access' Courses in England*. Lancaster: University of Lancaster.

- Mac an Ghaill, M. (1991). Young, Gifted and Black: Methodological Reflections of a teacher / researcher. In G. Walford (Ed.), *Doing Educational Research*. London: Routledge.
- Mac an Ghaill, M. (1994). *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Maguire, M., & Ball, S. J. (1994). Researching politics and the politics of research: recent qualitative studies in the UK. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 7(3), 271-285.
- Mangan, P. (1991). Access Courses (1978-88): Challenge and Change in the Education of Adults. In C. Chitty (Ed.), *Post-16 Education: Studies in Access and Achievement*. London: Kogan Page.
- Maynard, M., & Purvis, J. (Eds.). (1994). *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- McGiveney, V. (1990). *Education's for other people: Access to Education for Non-Participant Adults*. Leicester: NIACE.
- McPherson, A., & Raab, C. (1988). *Governing Education: A sociology of policy since 1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. California: Sage Publications.
- Miliband, R. (1968). *The State in Capitalist Society*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.
- Millins, P. K. C. (1984). *Access Studies to Higher Education, September 1979-December 1983: A Report*. Roehampton: Roehampton Institute, Centre for Access Studies to Higher Education.
- Mirza, H. S. (1994). *Making Sense of the Black Female Experience in Higher Education*. Paper presented at the Society for Research in Higher Education.
- Mirza, H. S. (1997). Black women in Education: A Collective Movement for social change. In H. S. Mirza (Ed.), *Black British Feminism: A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Mirza, H. S. (Ed.). (1997). *Black British Feminism: A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Modood, T. (1993). The number of Ethnic Minority Students in British Higher Education: Some grounds for optimism. *Oxford Review of Education*, 19(2), 167-182.
- Modood, T. (1998). Ethnic Minorities' Drive for Qualifications. In T. Modood & T. Acland (Eds.), *Race and Higher Education*. London: Policy Studies Institute.
- Modood, T., & Shiner, M. (1994). *Ethnic minorities and higher education: why are there differential rates of entry?* London: Policy Studies Institute.
- Morley, L. and Rassool, N. (1999) *School effectiveness: Fracturing the Discourse*. London: Falmer Press.



- Morris, A. (1992). *Beyond Qualifications: Alternative Routes to Higher and Further Education*. London: Institute of Education: Unified 16+ Curriculum Series, No. 2.
- Nove, A., Snape, D., & Chetwynd, M. (1997). *Advancing By Degrees: A Study of Graduate Recruitment and Skills Utilisation*. London: DfEE, Research Report RR33.
- Office of Population Census and Surveys (1983 and 1995) Statistical Bulletins.
- Ozga, J. (1981). *The Politics of the Teaching Profession: Unit 14 of E333 Society, Education and the State*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ozga, J. (1987) Studying education through the lives of the policy makers; an attempt to close the micro-macro gap. In L. Barton, and S. Walker, (eds) *Changing Policies, Changing Teachers*. Lewis : Falmer Press.
- Ozga, J. (1990). Policy research and Policy Theory: a comment on Fitz and Halpin. *Journal of Education Policy*, 5(1), 359-363.
- Ozga, J. (2000). *Policy Research in Educational Settings*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Parry, G. (1996). Access Education in England and Wales 1973-1994: from second chance to third wave. *Journal of Access Studies*, 11(1), 10-33.
- Parry, G., & Percy, K. (1995). Licensed Partnership: State, Region and Institution in the Regulation of Access Education in England 1987-1992. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 29(x), 1-18.
- Pollard, A. (1985). Opportunities and difficulties for a teacher-ethnographer: A personal account. In R. Burgess (Ed.), *Field Methods in the Study of Education*. London: Falmer.
- Poulantzas, N. (1978). *State, Power and Socialism*. London: NLB.
- Power, S. (1995). The Detail and the Bigger Picture: the use of state-centred theory in explaining education policy and practice. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 5(1), 77-92.
- Power, S., Edwards, T., Whitty, G., & Wigfall, V. (1998). School boys and School Work: Gender Identification and Academic Achievement. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 2(2), 135-155.
- Power, S., & Gewirtz, S. (1999). *Reading Education Action Zones*. Paper presented at the Paper given at the BERA Conference 1999.
- Raab, C. (1994) Where We Are Now: Reflections on the Sociology of Education Policy. In *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues*. (eds) D. Halpin and B. Troyna.
- Ramazanoglu, C. (1989) *Feminisms and the Contradictions of Oppression*. London: Routledge.
- Raybould, S. G. (1949). *The WEA: The Next Phase*. London: WEA.
- Reay, D. (1998). 'Always knowing' and never being sure: familial and institutional habituses and Higher Education Choice. *Journal of Education Policy*, 13(4), 519-531.

- Ribbens, J. (1994). *Mothers and Their Children: Towards a Feminist Perspective on Childrearing*. London: Sage.
- Rimington, M. (1992). Access Courses at City and East London College. In Morris, A. (Ed.), *Beyond Qualifications: Alternative Routes to Higher and Further Education*. London: Institute of Education: Unified Post-16 Curriculum Series, No. 2.
- Robbins Report. (1963). *Committee on Higher Education Report*. London: HMSO. Cmnd 2154.
- Rosen, V. (1990). *Beyond Higher Education: A Survey and Analysis of the Experiences of Access Students Proceeding Through the Polytechnic of North London and Into Employment*. London: Access to Learning for Adults.
- Salter, B., & Tapper, T. (1981). *Education, Politics and the State: The theory and practice of Educational Change*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Savage, M. (2000) *Class Analysis and Social Transformation*, Buckingham: OU Press.
- Scott, P. (1995). *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.
- Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences of Work In the New Capitalism*. New York : W.W. Norton & Company .
- Sewell, T. (1997). *Black Masculinities and Schooling: How black boys survive modern schooling*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Singh, R. (1990). Ethnic Minority Experience in Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 44(4), 345-359.
- Skeggs, B. (1994). Situating the production of Feminist Ethnography. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of Class and Gender: 'Becoming Respectable'*. London: Sage.
- Smith, D., Scott, P., and Mackay, L. (1993) Mission Impossible? Access and the Dash to Growth in British Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*. Vol.47 No.4 1993. 316-333
- Smithers, A., & Griffin, A. (1986). *The Progress of Mature Students*. Manchester: Joint Matriculation Board.
- Smithers, A., & Robinson, P. (1989). *Increasing Participation in Higher Education*. Manchester: School of Education, University of Manchester/ BP Educational Service.
- Social Exclusion Unit. (1998). *Truancy and Social Exclusion*. London: Stationary Office.
- Somekh, B. (1995). The contribution of action research to development in social endeavours: a position paper on action research methodology. *British Education Research Journal*, 21(3), 339-355.

- Spours, K., & Lucas, N. (1996). *The Formation of a National Sector of Incorporated Colleges: Beyond the FEFC Model*. London: Institute of Education: Post 16 Education Centre, Working Paper 19.
- Spours, K., Savory, C., and Hodgson, A. (2000) *Current Advanced Level Provision in England and Wales. Institutional Responses to Curriculum 2000*. Institute of Education /Nuffield Series. Number Two.
- Stake. (1994). Case Studies. In Denzin & Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A and Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures and Techniques*. London: Sage.
- Strauss, A and Corbin, J. (1994) Grounded theory methodology: An Overview. In Denzin & Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Taylor, P. (1992). Ethnic Groups: Data and Applications to Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 46(4), 359-374.
- Taylor, P. (1993). Minority Ethnic Groups and gender in access to Higher Education. *New Community*, 19(3), 425-440.
- Taylor, S. (1997). Critical Policy Analysis: exploring contexts, texts and consequences. *Discourse*, 18(1), 23-37.
- Tight, M. (1988). Access-not Access courses. *Journal of Access Studies*, 3(2), 6-13.
- Tight, M. (1993). Access, not Access Courses: maintaining a broad vision. In R. Edwards & S. Sieminski & D. Zeldin (Eds.), *Adult Learners, Education and Training*. London: Routledge in association with the Open University.
- Trade Union Congress. (1989). *Skills 2000*. London: TUC.
- UCAS. (1999). *Widening Participation Statistical Bulletin*. Cheltenham: UCAS.
- UCAS. (2000). *Rise in Scottish Higher Education Applications, Press Release, 14.4.00*. Cheltenham: UCAS.
- Wakefield, N. (1993). Beyond Educating Rita: mature students and Access Courses. *Oxford Review of Education*, 19(2), 218-230.
- Walford, G. (Ed.). (1991). *Doing Educational Research*. London: Routledge.
- Walford, G. (1991). Reflexive accounts of doing educational research. In G. Walford (Ed.), *Doing Educational Research*. London: Routledge.
- West, L. (1997). *Adults, Motivation and Higher Education. Beyond Fragments: a biographical analysis*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- White, C., & Crump, S. (1993). Education and the Three 'P's: policy, politics and practice. A Review of the work of S.J. Ball. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 14(4), 415-429.

- Whitty, G. (1992). Integrated Humanities and World Studies: Lessons from some Radical Curriculum Initiatives of the 1980s. In A. Rattansi & D. Reeder (Eds.), *Radicalism and Education: Essays for Brian Simon*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Whitty, G., Edwards, T., & Gewirtz, S. (1993). Specialisation and Choice in Urban Education: the City Technology College Experiment. London: Routledge.
- Whitty, G., Edwards, T., & Gewirtz, S. (1994). Researching Thatcherite Education Policy. In G. Walford (Ed.), *Researching the Powerful in Education: Social Research Today*. London: UCL Press.
- Whitty, G. and Kirton, A. (1995) From Learning Reform to Curriculum Reform: Curriculum Reform and Integrated Humanities in England. In *Issues on School Formation..* Tokyo, Japan Rodo-junpo-sha.
- Whitty, G. (1997). Ed.D. Lecture Notes. Institute of Education. London.
- Whitty, G., Power, S., & Halpin, D. (1998). *Devolution and Choice in Education: The School, the state and the market*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Whitty, G., Rowe, G., & Aggleton, P. (1994). Subjects and themes in the Secondary School Curriculum. *Research Papers in Education*, 9(2), 159-181.
- Williams, J. (1997). The Discourse of Access: The Legitimation of Selectivity. In J. Williams (Ed.), *Negotiating Access to Higher Education: The Discourse of Selectivity and Equity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Winter, R. (1996). Some principles and procedures for the conduct of action research. In Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed.), *New Directions in Action Research*. London: Falmer.
- Wilson, P. (2000). Time to update the Access Recognition Scheme? *Journal of Access and Credit Studies*. Vol.2 No.1 135-144.
- Woodrow, M. (2000). Putting a Price on a Priority: Funding an Inclusive HE. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 2(2), 2-6.
- The West Indian Community*. (1977). London: Home Office.
- Yates, J., & Davies, P. (1986). *The Progress and Performance of Former Access Students in Higher Education, 1984-1986*. London: Centre for Access Studies.
- Yin, R. K. (1989). *Case Study Research*. London: Sage.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed.). (1996). *New Directions in Action Research*. London: Falmer.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1**

**Interview questions. HELC students. 1992**

### **Appendix 2**

**Interview questions. HELC students in Higher or Further Education 1994 /1995**

### **Appendix 2b**

**Students who had chosen *not* to go onto Higher or Further Education at this point were asked the following questions**

### **Appendix 3**

**Interview questions. HELC students having left Higher or Further Education and entered the labour market 1997/1999**

### **Appendix 4**

**Interview questions. The parents of HELC students 1994 /1995**

### **Appendix 5**

**Group Interview Questions. HELC students March 1997**

### **Appendix 6**

**Interview questions. HELC tutors 1997**

### **Appendix 7**

**Social and educational biographies of students in the 1990-1992 cohort of the HELC**

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Interview questions. HELC students. 1992**

1. I want you to think back to your time at secondary school. Which school did you go to. Do you feel you achieved your potential there?
2. Tell me about your decision to come to Northside College. How and why did you come here?
3. How and why did you choose the HELC?
4. How do you feel about being on this course?
5. Are there good things about being on the HELC?
6. Are there any negative aspects of being on the Course?
7. Have you applied for a Higher Education Course. (if yes) Can you tell me about it?
8. (if no ) ask about intended employment or training.
9. What sort of job do you see yourself doing in 4/5 years?
10. What do your parents think about your plans after college?
11. How do your friends react to your decision to apply to H.E.?
12. Do you think Northside College has played a part in making you want to go onto higher education. If yes, give details.
13. Are any other factors important?
14. Have you visited an Institution of HE How did you feel about it?
15. What problems do you think you might face in your first year?
16. What do you think you might like about being in HE ?
17. Can you tell me about your family? Occupation of parents, religion, education, number in the family, ethnicity, politics. Do you think your parents would let me interview them?

## Appendix 2

### **Interview questions. HE LC students in Higher or Further Education 1994 /1995**

1. I want you to tell me about your experiences in higher or further education. How does it feel to be a higher education or further education student?
2. What about the work you have done? Have you learnt a lot? Have you enjoyed it?
3. How have you got on in lectures and seminars?
4. Was there any learning support?
5. What about your relationship with your tutor /lecturers.
6. What sort of grades have you got for your work?
7. Have you had any exams. Did you pass?
8. Did you get on well with other students?
9. Tell me about your social life.
10. How does higher or further education compare to Northside College?
11. Have any of the skills, knowledge, strategies, that you learnt on the course been useful to you?
12. Have you worked collaboratively with other students?
13. Have your attitudes towards the HELC changed since I interviewed you last?
14. Have your feelings about your secondary education changed as a result of your experiences over the last year?
15. Do you feel that all the effort you put into getting into HE or FE has been worthwhile?
16. Have your ideas changed about the sort of job you want to do?
17. Do you think your parents or friends regard you differently now because you are in FE or HE?
18. Do you think you have changed as a result of your experiences over the last year?  
(return to issues of ethnicity, social class, religion, locality, politics and gender)
19. What advice would you give to students just beginning their courses?
20. What do you think of government plans to widen access to HE. ( explain if necessary)
21. Anything else that you would like to tell me?

## Appendix 2b

### **Interview questions. Students who had chosen *not* to go onto Higher or Further Education at this point were asked the following questions.**

1. Have your attitudes towards the HELC changed since I interviewed you last?
2. Have your feelings about your secondary education changed as a result of your experiences over the last year?
3. Do you feel that all the effort you put into getting into HE or FE has been worthwhile?
4. Have your ideas changed about the sort of job you want to do?
5. Do you think you have changed as a result of your experiences over the last year?  
(return to issues of ethnicity, social class, religion, locality, politics and gender)
6. What do you think of Government plans to widen access to HE. ( explain if necessary)
7. Anything else that you would like to tell me? Can you tell me about your experiences over the last year?
8. Where have you been working?
9. Have you enjoyed it? What have you learnt?
10. How do you feel now about your decision not to go onto higher education?
11. Do you still intend to go onto higher education in the future?
13. Have your attitudes towards the HELC changed since I interviewed you last?
14. Have your feelings about your secondary education changed as a result of your experiences over the last year?
15. Do you feel that all the effort you put into getting into HE or FE has been worthwhile?
16. Have your ideas changed about the sort of job you want to do?
17. Do you think you have changed as a result of your experiences over the last year?  
(return to issues of ethnicity, social class, religion, locality, politics and gender)
18. What advice would you give to students just beginning their courses?
19. What do you think of government plans to widen access to HE. (explain if necessary)
20. Anything else that you would like to tell me?



### Appendix 3

#### **Interview questions. HELC students having left Higher or Further Education and entered the labour market 1997/1999**

1. Can you tell me what you have been doing since you left university or college.
2. (If appropriate) - is it rude to ask you how much you earn?
3. What do you feel about graduate or paraprofessional employment opportunities.
4. Who do you think are getting the jobs?
5. Is it qualifications that get you jobs?
6. Have your ideas about the job you wanted to do when you were at Northside College changed.
7. How do you feel now about your efforts to get into and succeed in HE.
8. What do you think you might be doing now if you had not gone onto H E?
9. What other things are important in your life. Tell me about them.
10. Reflecting back since secondary school and through Northside College and the HELC and into HE/FE what factors have influenced you?
11. Has having a degree changed the way you see yourself, your identity?
12. Has it changed the way other people see you?
13. Students were chosen for the HELC because they had been 'disadvantaged' in some way. What do you feel about the notion of disadvantage?
14. Reflecting back tell me what you liked and disliked about your time in HE/FE.
- 15.. What improvements would you make to HE/ FE?
16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

## Appendix 4

### Interview questions. The parents of HELC students 1994 /1995

1. I want to ask you some questions about the secondary education that.....received. Were you happy with it?..... left with ..... G.C.S.Es. How do you feel about that?
2. How often did you visit the school? What were your impressions of the school? Do you think ..... would have done better at another school? What do you think makes a 'good' school?
3. Why do you think ..... decided to continue with his /her education post-16?
4. What about the education ..... received at the NSFC. Were you happy with it?..... left with .....A levels and .....G.C.S.E's. How do you feel about that?
5. Did you visit the College? What were your impressions of the place? Do you think it was a good institution?
6. You know that ..... was on the HELC and got extra help ? Do you think this was useful for..... ( explain why or why not)?
7. What about ..... decision to go or not to go onto H.E. Was it discussed with you? What did you think of the decision?
8. Has anyone else in the family gone on to H.E.? If so, can you tell me about it?
9. Do you think H.E. will change ..... in any way ?
10. Has it been difficult for you financially or emotionally to support ..... through school and now H.E.?
11. How do you think it could be made easier for people like .....to go on to H.E.?
12. What sort of job would you like .....to end up doing?
13. You know that .....wants to be a .....What do you think of that?
14. Are there any particular factors in your family that has made going onto H.E. and doing well, important? (prompts .... religion, politics, your own experience of school or work )?

## Appendix 5

### Group Interview questions HELC students March 1997

1. What are your feelings when you think back to your time at school and at Northside College?
2. Do you feel that you did well at the college and if so why this was?
3. Some people, like some of the teachers at Bridge College felt that the college was a 'white middle class institution.' Do you think that this was true?
4. Looking back do you think the HELC was useful to you? Explain why or why not.
5. What about the other support schemes at the college were they useful?
6. Danny said in his interview that being on the HELC stigmatised him. What do the rest of you feel about this?
7. Was it worth the effort to work hard and get into HE?
8. How do you regard your time spent in HE?
9. What about the absence of graduate jobs does that worry you?
10. Is it qualifications that get you jobs?
11. What about those of you who haven't gone or have dropped out? Will you go to HE eventually?
12. Has the process of going through HE changed the way you and others see you? Has it changed your identities?
13. How would you describe your identities now?
14. What are the most important factors that have influenced to your educational careers?

## **Appendix 6**

### **Interview questions. HELC tutors 1997**

1. Can you tell me what your role was in setting up or running the HELC?
2. What do you think were the origins of the HELC?
3. To what extent do you think it was influenced by the success of access courses for mature adults?
4. To what extent was it part of an ethos or philosophy of Northside College?
5. How would you characterise that ethos?
6. Did the institution make a difference to the students on the HELC?
7. What were the difficulties that the course encountered?
8. Would you say it was a success?
9. Can you remember the 1990 intake of the HELC? Eight out of twelve have gone onto Higher Education. Do you think they would have made it without the Link Course?
10. What about the other support courses at the college were they useful? How do they compare?
11. Did the HELC have any wider effects on the Institution? If yes, in what ways?
12. Many of the students do not have graduate employment. Would you like to comment on this?
13. Can you tell me why the HELC is no longer operating and how you feel about this?
14. Are any new schemes planned?
15. Have you anything else to add about the course or the college?

## **Appendix 7**

### **Social and educational biographies of students in the 1990-1992 cohort of the HELC**

#### **ADE**

Ade's family are religious, her father a Muslim and her mother is a Pentecostal Christian (Brotherhood of Cross and Star) as is Ade. They attend the Pentecostal church. Ade had a very conflictual relationship with her mother causing her to leave home. Her father had been to university. Her mother, though supportive of Ade's plan to go onto higher education, did not seem to have any understanding of the level of commitment needed to do well at A level. She made a lot of demands on Ade to help with domestic work and child-care. Ade's education was interrupted when the family moved from Nigeria to London. She applied for the HELC because she felt she needed a lot of support, especially with her written and spoken English

#### **DANNY**

Danny described himself as Black British. His father, a psychiatric nurse, doing a Ph.D. part-time, is from Ghana and his mother an unemployed nurse, is from Mauritius. He is an only child, brought up by his mother. He visited NSFC and liked the atmosphere. Danny originally embarked on his A levels in September 1989 but found the transition from school difficult to deal with. He decided to leave the college. He returned the following year. He explains that it was the extra help and the links with HE that had attracted him to the course. He was accepted onto the HELC and took English A level and GCSE Maths and A level Sociology in one year. His teachers characterised him as having very good intellectual abilities, enormous potential but lacking in confidence. He was a very complex and sensitive character and had difficult problems in his home life.

#### **DENISE**

Denise's family belong to the World Wide Church of God (similar to the Seventh Day Adventists) Denise's mother explains the influence of religion on her children ' Well because, they don't go out in the evenings with friends, because they know that once they start to do something like that, that will cut something in their education. So I believe it's

a lot to do with the church as well.’ Denise was characterised by her teachers as lacking in confidence, quiet in class. She had chosen NSFC because it was local and for 16-19 year olds rather than adults. She was regarded as a good candidate for the HELC because of her weak GCSE base.

### **ELENI**

Eleni describes herself as Greek though she was born in Britain. Her mother is a secretary and interpreter at the local magistrates court. Her father is an insurance agent the son of factory owners who fell on hard times. Neither parent attended higher education. Eleni’s father went to a private school. Eleni decided to go to NSFC because her brother was there and he told her it was a good place. She applied to do A levels but without any of the entry requirements she had to enrol on GCSE courses. During her GCSE year her Media Studies teacher recommended the HELC to her, knowing she would require a lot of support to produce the written work required for A level. Her teachers characterised her as bright, supportive to other students, very competent with equipment and skilled at practical work, weaker on written work. She characterises herself as interested in technical and practical work, especially photography

### **KIT**

Kit and her family are members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and this plays an important part in her family life and she feels it has affected her educational attainment. Her parents believe ‘in bettering themselves and the only way to do this is through education.’ Her religious background, however, had not helped her to achieve against the odds at school. She had attended NSFC in the evenings to do Music while she was at school and had found it a pleasant environment to work in. She came to the Open Day and found the GCSE courses she wanted. After a year at NSFC the HELC was suggested to her when she applied to do two A levels. She is interested in the theatre, black history and literature and is an excellent actor and singer in a gospel choir.

### **LISA**

Lisa describes herself as White British and working class despite having a service class

mother, an FE lecturer. Both her parents had been to Oxbridge. Her father was an ex-steel worker and Trade Unionist who went to Ruskin College. He now drives a van for a living as well as being what Lisa calls, an 'equine economist,' that is, betting on horses. She applied to NSFC because her mother bullied her to do so. Instead of taking a vocational course, as advised, she spent a year taking A level Art, GCSE English and Maths. Before she could start on a second year she discovered that she was pregnant and left the College. When she returned after a year out having her baby she was advised very strongly to apply for the HELC. She brought Jade, her baby, to some of the Link sessions when child-care was a problem. She was very committed to providing stability for her daughter. Her teachers characterised her as having great potential and an intelligent approach to solving practical and academic problems.

### **LOLA**

Lola's family are all members of the Pentecostal Apostolic Church except for her father who is a Muslim. Religion is very important to the family especially since her brother who suffers from sickle cell anaemia had a stroke at the age of 18. Lola describes how prayers have really helped the family to cope. She links religion strongly with her ability to continue against the odds. She under-achieved at school and came to NSFC to take four GCSEs. She explains her decision - 'my sister said that the teachers were good and that they encouraged you a lot and you had a high pass rate. ' Her success at these and prompting by her tutor resulted in her applying for two A levels and the HELC. She was attracted by the extra support. She explains- 'At that time I didn't think I could cope with three A levels, I thought two would be an easier decision. I thought if I was going to be given more support and a lower offer than anyone else I might as well take that decision.'

### **MARK**

Mark described himself as white British and a Labour supporter. Mark's parents divorced and he was brought up by his mother who is French and a psycho-therapist. His father, a businessman, supported him financially and took a great interest in his education. He has one older brother and all the members of his family have gone onto higher education. He seriously under-achieved at school leaving with seven Grade Ds at GCSE. He decided that he had to leave his school at sixteen if he was going to do well. He chose NSFC

because he visited and liked the look of it. One of the problems was that Tim was also coming to the College and they had messed about together at school. Mark explained how they had discussed it and felt that they had now grown up a bit. He spent his first year at NSFC doing four GCSEs Media Studies, Law, English which he passed and Maths which he failed. He then applied to do two A levels, Politics and Media and the HELC because 'you could do your homework in your lessons and you could get into University on a low grade.' His interest in higher education was secondary to making it as a professional footballer. His teachers characterised him as having ability and potential but never realising it. He was regarded as immature, only prepared to work at the things that interested him. He was regarded by his teachers as a 'lad' who survived on fantasies about being a professional footballer and the sort of glamorous lifestyle that involved.

## **MAX**

Max described himself as Black British and said 'I've gone away from the family ..they're Afro-Caribbean... I'm like the deviant of the family.' Central to Max's biography is his feelings about his abandonment by his parents. They had split up when he was small and he had lost touch with them. His father lives in Germany and his mother in the U.S.A. He was unsure of their occupations. No-one in the family had gone onto higher education. He was brought up by his Grandmother, a retired seamstress. He had a conflictual relationship with her and she eventually asked him to leave her home in his first year at NSFC. After sleeping rough he was offered a home by the middle class family of an ex-girlfriend who was a NSFC student. He was characterised by his teachers as having ability but letting other things get in the way of his academic success. His attendance and punctuality were poor due to problems at home and ill health, in particular, sickle cell anaemia. He was indecisive and needed a lot of emotional support. One of his teachers said he thought he had an identity problem. He was a sensitive young man interested in Art and Fashion. After a year taking GCSEs he applied for A levels and the HELC encouraged by his tutor who thought he had the ability but needed a lot of support.



## **SETH**

Seth's strong but sometimes ambivalent relationship with his mother was a distinct aspect of his biography. He also comes from a very religious family. His father, who is a Vet, lives in Sierra Leone, is a Muslim and his mother is a Pentecostal Christian.

This network had provided her with the information that NSFC was a good place for Seth to do his A levels. She was a very devout Christian and a very strict mother. The other very strong influence in Seth's life was his music. He was a very good rap artist and spent a lot of time writing and recording songs. He drew on his experiences of London and Africa, Sierra Leone and the 'black consciousness' he had developed at his Seventh Day Adventist School in North London. There was a real conflict between these interests and his academic studies. He often neglected work that he found difficult, didn't organise his time and keep to deadlines and lets extra curricular activities especially his music get in the way of his academic work. His awareness of this led him to enrol for the HELC despite having the required number of GCSEs for A level courses.

## **TIM**

Tim was middle class and had attended a comprehensive in a neighbouring borough where he under-achieved. He identified himself as Black British and said that he voted Labour in the 1992 election. He and his sister had been adopted by white parents when they were babies. Then his adopted parents had their own child. Both adopted parents went to University, Oxford and Durham. His father is a senior Civil Servant and his mother a University administrator. Tim felt ambivalent about his background.

He decided on the NSFC because his sister had attended and 'I needed a change and I thought this place would make me grow up faster.' His success in his GCSE year at NSFC made him realise that he was capable of good grades. He decided to do the HELC because of the extra help provided. He was accepted on the HELC because he had shown that he had potential during his GCSE year. He was characterised by teachers as a student who had very effectively used the college to improve his confidence and catch up. He had had learning difficulties at primary school. His biggest problem was poor punctuality and organisation.

## ZELDA

Zelda also described herself as Black British and left wing. She was been brought up by her mother, a nursery nurse who trained to be a primary teacher. Zelda and her mother have a strong relationship. She is an important role model for Zelda and a source of inspiration for her well-developed black political consciousness. Zelda decided to apply to NSFC because 'it was best for her to get away from her secondary school and start again,' also A level Media Studies was on offer and it was not available at her school. She had heard the teachers at NSFC were really 'easy going and that students called them by their first names.' She was accepted to do GCSE Maths and A level English and Media Studies. Zelda joined the HELC late. During the Autumn term, she found keeping up with the work for her A level English difficult and her teacher suggested that she join the HELC. She fitted in very easily and was a strong member of the group. Her teachers characterised her as determined and displaying a genuine interest in her subjects. She characterised herself as easy to get on with, reliable and hardworking.

